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NEW! ISSUE THREE

COMIC HEROES

WE ARE THE WALKING DEAD

WRITER ROBERT KIRKMAN, ARTIST CHARLIE ADLARD AND THE CAST OF THE NEW TV SHOW INTERVIEWED!

DESIGNING THE X-MEN

HOW WOLVERINE, BEAST, NIGHTCRAWLER AND THE REST MADE IT TO THE MOVIES

"THEY'RE NOT MADE TO CHANGE OR DIE"

GRANT MORRISON TALKS BATMAN, THE DC UNIVERSE... AND ALAN MOORE!

HOW TO DRAW COMICS

Dave Gibbons
Chris Weston
Mike Perkins
and more tell YOU how to do it!

THE AVENGERS

The ultimate guide to Marvel's mightiest heroes!

PLUS!

SCOTT PILGRIM, CHARLES VESS, THE SANDMAN, BRYAN TALBOT, KICK-ASS, DAVE MCKEAN, JIM LEE, JUDGE DREDD, SEAN PHILLIPS AND MUCH, MUCH MORE!

COMIC HEROES

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AUTUMN 2010

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FROM THE MAKERS OF SFX MAGAZINE

COMIC HEROES

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NEXT *COMIC HEROES* ON SALE: Tuesday 14 December

Magazine printed in the UK by William Gibbons and cover printed in the UK by Midway Colour Print, on behalf of Future

Distributed in the UK by Seymour Distribution Ltd, 2 East Poultry Avenue, London EC1A 9PT **Tel:** 0207 429 4000
Overseas distribution by Future Publishing Ltd, Bath
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Brought to you by: The eternal question ("Who was the Fictionaut in Warren Ellis's *Planetary*?" Anyone? Anyone? We reckon it was Grant Morrison), the Pink Limo, chocolate buttons and fizzy wine, re-watching every episode of *The Sopranos*, re-reading Neil Gaiman's *1602* and discovering that it's pretty bloody good.

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Future plc is a public company quoted on the London Stock Exchange (symbol: FUTR).
www.futureplc.com

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"I am perfectly clement in the bladder area, thank you."

BRAINS! BRAINS!

Who doesn't love a good zombie? They're our favourite form of the undead,* and it's been a real thrill to talk to Robert Kirkman and Charlie Adlard this issue about their stupendous *Walking Dead* series, along with the cast of the tremendously exciting new TV series.**

That's not all we've got, though. The marvellous Grant Morrison has a good old natter over on page 36, and we've got something of a comic art special going on, too, with honking great interviews with Jim Lee, Bryan Talbot, Charles Vess, Sean Phillips and anyone who's anyone in the first instalment of How To Draw Comics. Cor!***

So I hope, as ever, that you enjoy the issue; it's packed full of comic-y goodness. And, if you like what you see, here's some good news: we're now proud to be able to offer subscriptions to *Comic Heroes*! Pop over to page 124 to subscribe, and save some cash**** while doing so.

See you in issue four!

Jes Bickham,
Editor,

*Apart from the whole brain-eating thing. Makes conversation very difficult.
**Who we interviewed last issue too. Think of him as *Comic Heroes*' magnificiently-coiffed unofficial mascot.
***And as if that wasn't all exciting enough, the legendary Harlan Ellison called us recently to tell us how much he loved issue two of *Comic Heroes*. His favourite bit? Lew Stringer's history of British humour comics. Fact!
**** Why not buy some biscuits with it, or some new socks?

MEET THE TEAM

Comic Heroes' own caped crusaders (minus the capes)...

JOE NAZZARO

Joe Nazzaro is a New Jersey/London-based freelancer who's written for more genre magazines than he cares to remember. He's currently working on a book about the un-making of Neil Gaiman's *Neverwhere* TV series.

MATTHEW BADHAM

As a comics-obsessed teenager, Matthew wanted to be Alan Moore when he grew up. Unfortunately, he soon discovered that the job was already taken. Instead he writes articles for various publications and websites.

MICHAEL MOLCHER

Michael once commissioned a famous artist to draw a secret birthday present for his girlfriend. When she dumped him, he kept it. Be warned ladies, this man writes for *2000 AD* and *Comic Heroes*.

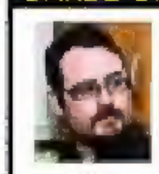
DANIEL ETHERINGTON

For every time the disapproving woman in the local library has looked askance at Daniel for taking out a graphic novel or trade paperback, here's the proof that it's a valid professional interest.

ROB WILLIAMS

Sir Robert of Williams is a comic writer and a freelance journalist. His work has been published in titles as diverse as *Wolverine, GQ, 2000 AD, Deadpool, Star Wars, Tomb Of Terror* and (yes!) *The Financial Times*.

CHRIS BROSNAHAN



Chris has been reading comics since the late '80s. He edits geekplanetonline.com and hosts its Panel Talk comics podcast. He enjoyed the excuse to revisit *Sandman* this issue, although he usually doesn't need one.

FROM THE MAKERS OF SFX MAGAZINE

Contents

NEW! FROM SFX: COMIC HEROES AUTUMN 2010

NEWS

8 HEAT VISION!
The bit of the mag we call 'news'. Read all about the comic movie happenings from San Diego Comic-Con (plus Tony Lee's Comic-Con diary!), Dave McKean's latest gig and all the best new comics.

FEATURES

22 THE WALKING DEAD
Robert Kirkman! Charlie Adlard! Andrew Lincoln! And some others!

32 BRYAN TALBOT
The esteemed artist takes us through the making of *Grandville Mon Amour*.

36 GRANT MORRISON
The mind-bending writer exposes the contents of his brain – just for us!

44 THE AVENGERS
The history of the Marvel universe, as seen through its mightiest supergroup.

52 SMALL PRESS COMICS
We look at grass roots comics in 'The Scene That Is Not A Scene'.

58 JIM LEE
He needs no introduction – so turn to page 58, *now*!

64 DIGITAL COMICS
Rich Johnston goes 'Down The Digital Rabbit Hole' and explores the possibilities of digital comics...

70 THE ART OF SEAN PHILLIPS
None more black, that's our Sean's art. Take a look and see why he's the new face of comics noir.

76 DESIGNING THE X-MEN
How our favourite mutants were created for their big-screen adventures.

84 COMIC ICONS: THE SANDMAN
We go into the arms of Morpheus.

90 CHARLES VESS
The fairytale artist takes us from Shakespeare to *Stardust*.

96 HOW TO DRAW COMICS
The writers have had their say – now it's over to the artists!

110 COMIC CLUB
What you think about Grant Morrison and Frank Quitely's *All-Star Superman*.

REVIEWS

114 SCOTT PILGRIM
Has Edgar Wright come up trumps?

115 DC ROUND-UP
The ongoing big events in the DCU – plus the Marvel Universe over on p117!

119 JUDGE DREDD
The big man's latest case files, along with the ABC Warriors. Yes!

PLUS! *Death's Head*, *Day Of The Deal*, *Kick-Ass*, SelfMadeHero graphic novels, *Fear Agent*, *Batman: Under The Red Hood* and much more!

22 THE WALKING DEAD
The writer! The artist! The TV show! Blimey.

32
BRYAN TALBOT
Peek inside the new *Grandville*...

44 THE AVENGERS
The history of Marvel's mightiest heroes. Assemble!

36
GRANT MORRISON
The *Batman* writer spills the bat-beans.

96
HOW TO DRAW COMICS
Professional comic artists deal out their wisdom!

58
JIM LEE
DC's co-publisher gives us the gab.

76
THE X-MEN
How the merry mutants made it to the big screen...

84
THE SANDMAN
Comic Icons returns!

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MIRACLE MAIL

WELCOME!

GREETINGS, EARTHMEN! Phew. It's all go 'round here. Not content with having to put 132 fat pages of *Comic Heroes* together for your delectation, I've also got further responsibilities as a costumed crimefighter cleaning up the mean streets of Bath under cover of night, which doesn't leave a lot of time for watching *EastEnders* or pondering what the Hell was going on in Grant Morrison's *The Invisibles*.

Still, it's not all bad, and we've found the time to plaster some of your letters over these two pages. We love hearing from you, so do please keep your correspondence coming – and remember, you can also contribute to our regular Comic Club feature towards the back of the mag.

Right. Time to don a balaclava, slip into Doris the cleaner's tights* and swish a bin-bag cape sinisterly around my shoulders, before giving those teenagers behind the bus station a ticking off for drinking cheap cider.** Until next time!

*Note: May not be true.
**Don't panic – she's not in them.
***A nice Merlot would be much classier. Honestly, kids today, etc.

Sidekick – much more than just comic previews!

Do you want us to explore girls' comics?

with great interest, and I can understand his views, but I was left wondering what he thinks of the current progs and *Megs*, particularly as his work for 'Tooth' is so fondly remembered and highly regarded by its fans. I was a bit puzzled by the Ron Smith thing in the *Nemesis* feature, but now I've seen your Facebook correction [It should have read 'Robin Smith'. Sorry everyone! – Ed].

Keep up the good work, looking forward to issue three!

RICHARD HERRERO, EMAIL

It was pretty scrotnig to see ourselves on the back of *2000 AD*, we have to admit. The Mighty Tharg is a close personal friend of ours, and we doff our cap to our favourite Betelgeusian editor. **Ed**

KICKED ASIDE

I just wanted to say how much I have loved the first two issues of *Comic Heroes*. I particularly loved the look back at British comics – I was lucky enough to have a mum who was very generous and much preferred me to have comics than sweets, so I read every title available when I was a little girl – I had completely forgotten some of them until I read your feature. I know that *SFX* covered the SF and horror aspects of girls' comics recently, but perhaps you might do a similarly detailed piece on them one day?

The only thing I don't love so far about *CH* is *Sidekick*. I'm sorry, but I hate 'previews' of comic books: excerpts that don't go anywhere are frustrating or dull. I love those showcase type things Vertigo do occasionally, with short stories featuring different characters. Something like that would be ace. Or if that's not practical, maybe if you had a single strip from a guest artist or writer each issue. Or a reprint of a classic story, so long as it was standalone. Just a thought!

When will I be able to subscribe to *CH*? I want to be able to relax in the knowledge I won't miss an issue. Keep up the good work!

TARTEBLANCHE, EMAIL

We're sorry to hear you're not a fan of *Sidekick* in its present incarnation; we've had lots of good feedback on it, but your criticisms are, of course, equally valid! We'll have a look at more self-contained strips. All submissions are welcome!

And here's some good news: thanks to overwhelming demand, you can now subscribe to *Comic Heroes*, and save some money while you're at it. Hurrah! Turn to page 124 to find out how. **Ed**

WRONG RON

Borag thungg, Earthlets!

I don't browse the magazine shelves so, being a *2000 AD* subscriber, your advert on the back of *Prog 1693* reminded me to get out and buy issue two. (I found out about issue one through *2000 AD* too!) Great to see *2000 AD* related stuff getting a healthy amount of content in both issues.

Time constraints prevent me from venturing much beyond *2000 AD* and the *JD Megazine* in terms of comics, but your mag keeps me informed. Always a treat to see Johnny Hicklenton's art, so thanks for splashing several pieces of his work around his obituary. I read Alan Moore's interview

BAD BOY

I do agree that *Preacher*'s Herr Starr was a real bad boy, but I can't help but feel sorry for him due to the amount of abuse Garth Ennis heaped on him... he's already missing an eye, he gets raped in an alley by Roy Glover, Tulip O' Hare shoots his ear off, cannibals eat his right leg, a female rottweiler bites his todger off and, finally, Tulip blows his brains out...

GARY WATSON, NORTHUMBERLAND

It really is quite the litany of misfortune, isn't it? You can't say that he didn't deserve a lot of it, though... **Ed**

IN BRIEF...

Little bits, taken out of context

I would have liked to write before the second issue of *Comic Heroes*, but have failed miserably so I'm emailing you instead.
Evander Reeves, email
And a lovely email it was, too.

I third James Ronald Cobley!
Christopher Royles, Facebook
James Ronald Cobley for President!

I fourth James Ronald Cobley.
CJ Gordon, Facebook
Isn't he President?

Apart from the rantings of Alan Moore I really enjoyed issue two of *Comic Heroes*.
David Soulsby, email
That's okay. He really enjoyed your email.

You have made a sad comic geek very happy.
John Philliban, email
We live to give, John.

What kind of farts go 'quack'?
Mark Loughlin, Facebook
A duck's?

RED looks good on a guilty level!
Stephen Bridge, Facebook
There's no guilt in Helen Mirren with a machine gun, Stephen.

Please feature an interview with Bryan Talbot soon!
Neil Baxter, Halesowen
Your wish is our command, Mr Baxter. Turn to page 32 right now! Mmm.

Could *The Boys* make it to the big screen?

BOYS' OWN

I had to laugh at your article about *The Boys* and the chances of a film being made. I'm an avid reader of this comic and I think that the film would be something to behold. A cross between *Hostel* and a porn film with a bit of The Three Stooges thrown in. This should be the best 'adult' comic book movie ever. Do you think they'll ask a certain actor to play Wee Hughie?

MIKE GARNER, MOORENDS

We'll be amazed if *The Boys* makes it to the cinema in a form anything like the comic, frankly. Actually, you know what we'd like to see? An adaptation of Ennis's *Kev*. That would work brilliantly as a weekly TV show... **Ed**

MILES HIGH

I just wanted to add my own congratulations to you on a fantastic magazine! I love the mix of UK and American, mainstream and indie, as well as printed material, movies and games all related to the humble comic book. Where else can you move from Alan Moore's fascinating interview to an appreciation of the genius of O'Neil and Adams's *Green Lantern/Green Arrow* to a guide to manga – inspired!

What especially heightened my enjoyment is that I bought another comic-related publication on the same day, and was annoyed by the lack of anything substantial (or indeed interesting – one of the main features was what comic book image first turned you on?!) within it. Let's just say that it wasn't very 'wizard'. In addition, with Comics International having a shipping schedule that makes the last issue of Warren Ellis's *Planetary* seem punctual (come back Dez, all is forgiven), *Comic Heroes* represents the only ray of light for comic fans.

I do, however, echo Simon Werrett's comments that it's daunting to try to work out what might be good. For example, while I used to be a fervent collector of individual comics, life (and a wife and child) has meant that I now mainly get my 'fix' from trade paperbacks of collected series. So which series should I be picking up next? I like *Fables*, but does this mean I'll like *Jack Of Fables*? Anyway, I would find it really helpful if you had a feature that talked about forthcoming trade paperbacks of recent series. In particular – like Amazon – it would be great if you could recommend new picks based on previous series. Also, considering you speak to so many fascinating professionals working in comics, it would be great to ask them about what they're reading – what they would recommend.

Long live *Comic Heroes* and all who sail her!

MILES BURGER, EMAIL

Thanks Miles! And sorry we couldn't print your generous missive in its entirety. You hit a good point, though; we've had a few requests for some kind of beginner's guide, or comics roadmap. It's all well and good knowing you like, say, *Spider-Man* – but even then, where do you start with the character? We'll have a think and see if it's something we can do for issue four... **Ed**

HEAT VISION

THE HOTTEST NEWS FOR ALL THINGS COMICS!

COMIC HEROES THIS ISSUE'S HIGHLIGHTS

Do You Believe?
10 Say hello to *Resonance*, a new multi-media project with its own graphic novel.

Big Deal
11 Writer/artist/publisher Jason Wilson talks about the story behind his ace true crime graphic novel *Day of the Deal*. Yup.

New Comics!
12 Want to know all the major releases coming your way? Simply flip to page 12 right now!

The Dream Master
14 *Sandman* cover artist Dave McKean talks to us about his latest project, *Slog's Dad*.

Comic-Con Diary
16 Acclaimed comics writer Tony Lee tells us all about his San Diego Comic-Con experience.

CONVENTION

FOUR COLOURS ON FILM

The recent **San Diego Comic-Con** was awash with comic movie news; **David West** rounds up the best...

Few would argue that Marvel stole the spotlight at Comic-Con this year with a succession of sneak peaks and big announcements. When Marvel released the first six minutes of footage from Kenneth Branagh's *Thor*, it was met with nigh-on universal acclaim from the assembled members of fandom.

Chris Hemsworth plays the thunder god, alongside Anthony Hopkins as Odin, Natalie Portman as Jane Foster and Tom Hiddleston as Loki.

The story sees Thor cast down to Earth by Odin to teach his headstrong offspring some sorely needed humility. Stripped of his powers, Thor must prove himself worthy to reclaim his enchanted hammer, Mjolnir, and the mantle of thunder god. Then the Destroyer shows up and it looks exactly the way Jack Kirby drew it back in *Journey Into Mystery* #118 in 1965, which is pretty cool. The trailer was leaked onto the web, only for Marvel to instantly take it down, driving fans into a frenzy.

From Marvel's most powerful Avenger to its most patriotic, Chris Evans plays the Super Soldier in *Captain America: The First Avenger*. Joe Johnston directs, while the excellent Hugo Weaving plays Cap's arch-nemesis the Red Skull. Weaving revealed at Comic-Con that he based the Skull's accent on maverick filmmaker Werner Herzog. Not sure if that's a compliment or not, really. *The First Avenger* will be the story of Steve Rogers's transformation from a 90-pound weakling to a one-man army, set in the 1940s. Stanley Tucci is lined up to play Dr Erskine, creator of the Super Soldier Formula – provided his career survives working with Christina Aguilera and Cher in *Burlesque*, that is...

"THE STORY SEES THOR CAST DOWN TO EARTH BY ODIN TO TEACH HIS HEADSTRONG OFFSPRING SOME SORELY NEEDED HUMILITY"

The film stays faithful to the '60s comics.

THE CAPTAIN

If one story dominated the news at Comic-Con this year, it was Marvel's *The Avengers*. First, Joss Whedon announced he will be directing the movie, and fanboys across the globe were heard to emit involuntary squeaks of delight. Then the cast came out and lined up – excuse us – assembled on stage: Robert Downey Jr (Iron Man), Clark Gregg (SHIELD Agent Coulson), Scarlett Johansson (Black Widow), Chris Hemsworth (Thor),

it's pretty angsty having to mix with mere mortals, we hear.

The *Avengers* cast – who's keen for 2012?

Chris Evans (Cap), Samuel L. Jackson (Nick Fury), Jeremy Renner (Hawkeye) and Mark Ruffalo, who replaces Ed Norton as Bruce Banner. "This is the most ambitious movie ever," declared Downey with customary hyperbole. Whedon has two years to put all of the pieces together – *The Avengers* isn't due out until summer 2012. Marvel is clearly planning to build momentum before then – Thor is getting a second monthly comic while a cartoon, *The Avengers: Earth's Mightiest Heroes*, is in the works for the Disney XD channel.

BUILDING BUZZ

With only one big movie to push at Comic-Con, DC put the spotlight on *Green Lantern*. Martin Campbell, who revitalised the *007* franchise with *Casino Royale*, will direct Ryan Reynolds as Hal Jordan, alongside Mark Strong as Sinestro and Blake Lively as Carol Ferris, the woman who becomes Star Sapphire. Reynolds is no stranger to the long underwear crowd from his stint as Deadpool, and earned major kudos from the comic community by reciting the Green Lantern's oath from memory at the request of a young fan. Not content to let Marvel dominate the airwaves, DC is planning a *Green Lantern Corps* animated series on Cartoon Network and is in development for a big screen outing for the Flash.

Odin: so powerful he can afford a gold eyepatch.

by bashing it in the face with something blunt and heavy. The movie, directed by James Gunn, generated strong buzz at Comic-Con but there is no word yet on distribution.

Grant Morrison is set to turn screenwriter with a new project called *Sinatoro*. According to the Comic-Con press release the story involves a man with no memories who teams up with "a deranged astronaut, a drunken cowboy, and an army of hobos" to fight evil. Just another normal day in the mind of Grant Morrison. The movie is still in the writing stages, but director Adam Mortimer is aiming for a 2012 release.

"GRANT MORRISON IS SET TO TURN SCREENWRITER WITH A NEW PROJECT CALLED SINATORO"

Some films come to Comic-Con riding on anticipation and hype – others come looking for distribution. *Super* stars Rainn Wilson from the US version of *The Office* as a man who loses his wife (Liv Tyler) to a drug dealer (Kevin Bacon) after she becomes addicted to heroin. So he makes a costume, calls himself the Crimson Bolt and – with the help of an unhinged teenage sidekick (Ellen Page) – sets out to rid the world of evil

GOONING AROUND

Dark Horse Comics' *The Goon* is getting an animated feature film to be produced by David Fincher, whom you might remember from *Se7en* and *Fight Club*. Paul Giamatti and Clancy Brown will provide the voices for Franky and The Goon, respectively. Blur Studios and *Goon* creator Eric Powell presented a 30-second trailer complete with zombies, gangsters and great dialogue. Case in point: "Now I'm gonna learn you boys a thing or two about internal bleeding."

Finally, Will Eisner's celebrated graphic novel *A Contract With God* is to be turned into a film. A different director will handle each of the four stories that comprise Eisner's ruminations on the brutality of life in New York in the 1930s: Alex Rivera, Tze Chun, Barry Jenkins and Sean Baker. "*A Contract With God* is a masterclass in visual storytelling – groundbreaking, humanistic, moving, and rich in detail," said Chun. "Within these four short stories, Eisner creates an entire world. I'm very excited to be a part of the team that will bring this film to life." CH

But how does Captain America go to the toilet? Did anyone think of *that*, eh?

OBJECT OF DESIRE

DO YOU BELIEVE?

Multimedia extravaganza extends its tendrils into comics...

***Resonance* is an upcoming transmedia sci-fi project that follows a group of people caught up in a secret battle to control a mythical object of great power called the Resonant Object.**

The main platform for the first series is six 15-minute online dramas, directed by Colin Teague (*Doctor Who*) and starring both Aidan Turner (*Being Human*) and screen legend Charles Dance. As well as watching the show, you'll be able to explore the narrative through online games, alternate reality games (ARGs), music, comics and graphic novels.

The trailer is already available to watch at the *Resonance* website (www.wiyouhelp.co.uk), along with lots more information about the project. The creators want to demonstrate the power of collaboration, so there'll be plenty of opportunities to get involved across the various platforms if you're interested.

These images are a sneak preview of the graphic novel series that will run in parallel with the online drama, and will expand and develop the story. Anthony Hope-Smith is on illustration duties – his highly anticipated graphic autobiography of Hunter S Thompson (called *Gonzo* and written by Will Bingley) is released by SelfMadeHero in October 2010 [reviewed next issue! – Ed].

Throughout *Resonance*, the story of the Object is interwoven into real historical events. Its origins and the exact nature of its power are unknown. It's been used to build civilisations and create great art. It's also been used to destroy armies, and has played a part in some of the most significant events in history: the fall of the Roman Empire, the Renaissance, the Industrial Revolution... It's been traded and fought over in secret for thousands of years.

The year is May 1941 and Rudolph Hess crash lands in Scotland, bringing with him the Object, which will turn the tide of World War 2. But it then disappears and remains hidden for 70 years. The online series will pick up the story in 2011, when the Object is unearthed by accident. Once again, secret organisations are gearing up to fight for possession of it. The battle will spill onto the streets. No one can be trusted. No one is safe!

■ You can read pages from the *Resonance* graphic novel in next issue's copy of *Sidekick*!

Anthony Hope-Smith is providing some stunning artwork.

EVOLUTION OF A WALLET

HOW ISSUE THREE'S WALLET WAS CREATED BY *COMIC HEROES'* OMNISCIENT ART MASTERMIND NICKY GOTOBED...

1

It all started with a mock-up cover for Diamond's *Previews* magazine, far in advance of issue three's production.

2

The Walking Dead made the grade! But we needed actual brain-munching zombies, not an angry man...

3

Voila! Gruesomely monochrome with sinister red eyes. Yum! Plus a bit of *X-Men*, Morrison and co. Aaaand relax.

CORRECTION CORNER

We're not perfect, you know. Sure, our personal hygiene is beyond reproach, but we make the occasional mistake. We're only human, after all (apart from every full moon, when we get a bit hairy). But, with that in mind, here are a couple of corrections and apologies concerning issue two of *Comic Heroes*. Our true intent is but to serve

- **So, firstly: our interview with Alan Moore was chiefly about his goodbye to the comics industry, but it's not his "Last Ever Comics Interview", as we billed it – Mr Alan Moore is of course free to talk about comics whenever he likes! Sorry, Alan.**
- **Secondly: in the "Nemesis The Warlock" retrospective, in the "White out!" boxout on page 51, we incorrectly billed Ron Smith as *2000 AD* art editor. Bryan Talbot was, of course, talking about Robin Smith. Sorry Bryan, Ron and Robin!**

CRIMINAL MINDS

A GOOD DEAL

True crime makes good comic material in the hands of Jason Wilson...

It's not often a Labour MP calls for your book to be banned, but that's what happened to Jason Wilson and his true crime-inspired graphic novel *Smuggling Vacation*.

With that book, and his new graphic novel *Day Of The Deal*, Wilson is telling comic tales set against the backdrop of his own experiences in the British drugs trade. But how did these books come to be?

Back in the '90s, Wilson, a 2D animator by trade, had his career cut short by the arrival of computer animation. Following this, he quickly found himself in the company of his estranged father, well-known international drug smuggler Anthony Spencer.

"Overnight, I was catapulted from the safe and easy world of drawing boards and ad agencies into the inner circle of an international smuggling ring," Jason recalls. "As the son of one of the top men, I saw, heard and experienced the most incredible things, but always from the point of view of an artist playing a part."

After several years, Jason retired himself from the business after arrests by undercover officers in Spain made it clear that he was living on borrowed time. "I returned to the UK and enrolled in several art courses, and in doing so rediscovered a love for film and graphic novels. Before long, I found myself designing a feature-length story based on my Spanish

Jason based his comics on his own real life experiences.

But they don't get much work done at that mag's offices...

experiences called *Smuggling Vacation*, which was quite therapeutic in many ways."

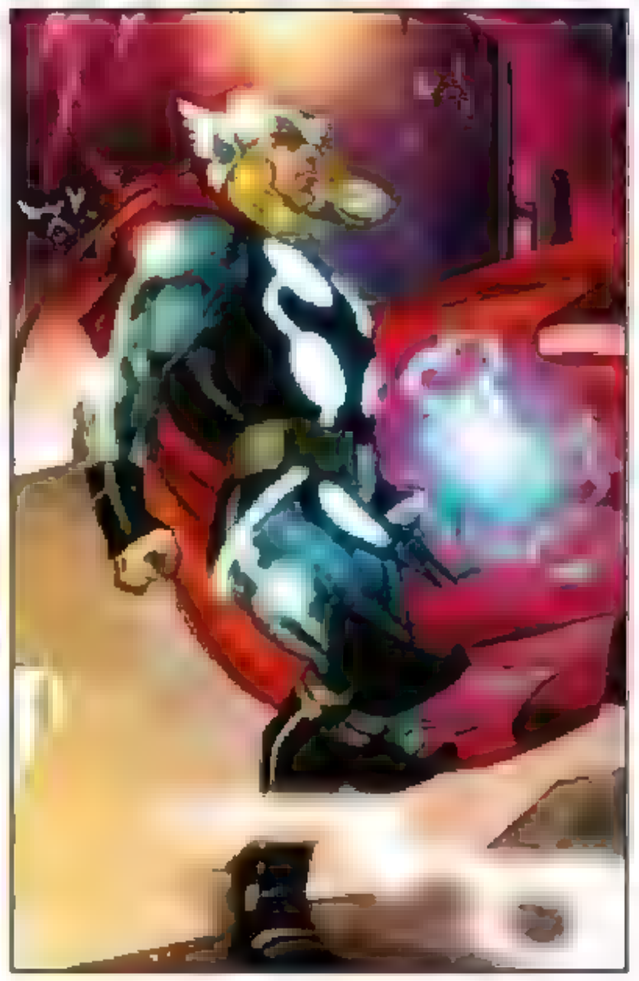
His latest book, *Day Of The Deal*, is based on real life events and told through the lives of everyman Stan Johnson and his fiery girlfriend Kaye Brown. It's about a drugs shipment in urgent need of an alternative destination, and how it disrupts and corrupts the lives of those who dare to get involved. The chief protagonist is Stan, a figure largely based upon Jason's younger self. "Like Stan, I frequently found myself out of my depth and surrounded by heavyweight criminals. And like Stan, for the best of reasons, I thought I'd stick it out to the very end. Though, luckily, I had more sense than Stan."

So has Jason experienced any regrets about swapping smuggling for writing?

"No, not at all," he insists. "I think that graphic novels are the great medium of our time – instant, personal and totally subjective. I think returning to an artistic path is the most rewarding thing I've ever done."

■ *Day Of The Deal* is out now; you can read the review over on page 117, and read sample pages in this issue's copy of *Sidekick*!

"AS THE SON OF ONE OF THE TOP MEN, I EXPERIENCED INCREDIBLE THINGS"



James Hunt peers into his crystal ball to find the big releases coming your way!

Unsure which titles to buy? Wish you knew in advance which releases will be on everyone's lips? Don't worry, help is at hand! This issue, *Comic Heroes* begins its regular look ahead at the must-read releases that are hitting comic shop shelves over the next few months!

MARVEL

With the *Thor* movie on the horizon, Marvel is keeping thunder-god fans busy, beginning in September when Matt Fraction (*Invincible Iron Man*, *Casanova*) begins his much-anticipated run in *Thor* #615. In October, Jonathan Hickman and Carlos Pacheco's *Ultimate Thor* #1 begins the origin of everyone's favourite Scandinavian superhero-hippie. Then in November there's *Astonishing Thor* #1 by Rob Rodi and Mike Choi, featuring Ego the Living Planet! If that's not enough for you, there's also *Thunderstrike*, *Thor: For Asgard*, *Loki* and *Iron Man/Thor*! With that much Asgardian excitement to flip through, your fingers will probably be thor by the end of it! (Fired! – Ed)

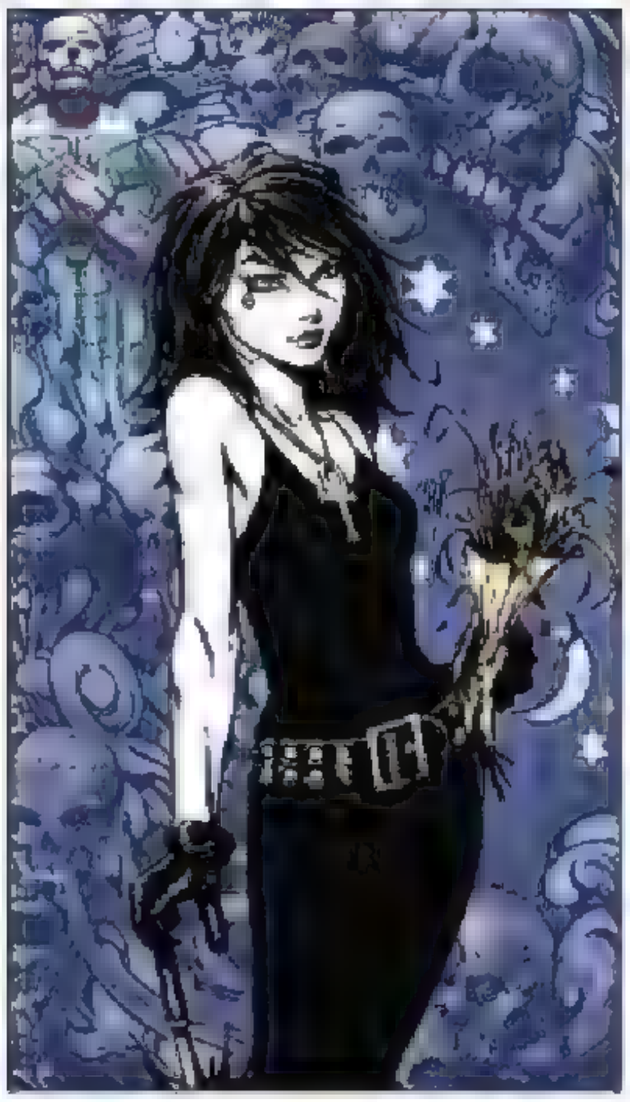
ABOVE: Just a flesh wound for Logan in the new *Wolverine* #1

X-Men fans also have a good couple of months in store – September's spotlight is on Jason Aaron and Renato Guedes's *Wolverine* #1, which literally sends Logan to Hell and spins off his two 'children' into ongoing books of their own with *X-23* #1 and *Daken: Dark Wolverine* #1. Skip on to November and Kieron Gillen and Salvador Espin's *Generation Hope* #1 tells the continuing stories of the first new mutants since the events of M-Day in a spiritual sequel to *Generation X*.

Also in November, the street-level crossover *Shadowland* concludes, and *Daredevil* #512 will be the series' final issue. No, really. Meanwhile, *Amazing Spider-Man* #648 makes a perfect jumping-on point, as the series streamlines onto a twice-monthly schedule under the sole authorship of Dan Slott. Fans of Spidey's teenage incarnation, however, will prefer the 104 page anniversary blowout in *Ultimate Spider-Man* #150.

If you prefer your Marvel comics unconventional, there's September's *One Month To Live*, in which a banker discovers that the same accident that's threatening his life has also given him super-powers, while October's *Strange Tales II* marks the return of the adult-content indie-anthology, setting the likes of Nick Gurewitch, Kate Beaton and Jhonen Vasquez loose on Marvel's finest. Expect plenty of MODOK!

Finally, fans of uncensored action can look forward to *Kick-Ass 2: Balls To The Wall* #1 in September, and in October, there's the adult-oriented



"ACTION COMICS #894 PITS LEX LUTHOR AGAINST DEATH OF THE ENDLESS IN A RARE, GAIMAN-SANCTIONED APPEARANCE"

Deadpool Max #1 and Millar/Yu's new icon property, *Superior*.

DC

For the next few months, DC's publishing strategy is simply Batman, Batman and more Batman – which is understandable when you've got Grant Morrison on board! In September, Morrison fulfils the series' eponymous promise in *Batman: The Return Of Bruce Wayne* #6, before joining fan-favourite artist David Finch for *Batman: The Return* #1 in October – leading straight into the November launch of the new flagship Bat-title, *Batman, Inc* #1.

That same month, *Batwoman* #0 brings the stunning art of JH Williams back to the character following a critically-acclaimed *Detective Comics* arc, this time with writer W Haden Blackman. Those who like their comics closer to home would be fools to miss October's *Knight And Squire* #1, in which Captain Britain alumnus Paul Cornell writes London's answer to the caped crusaders.

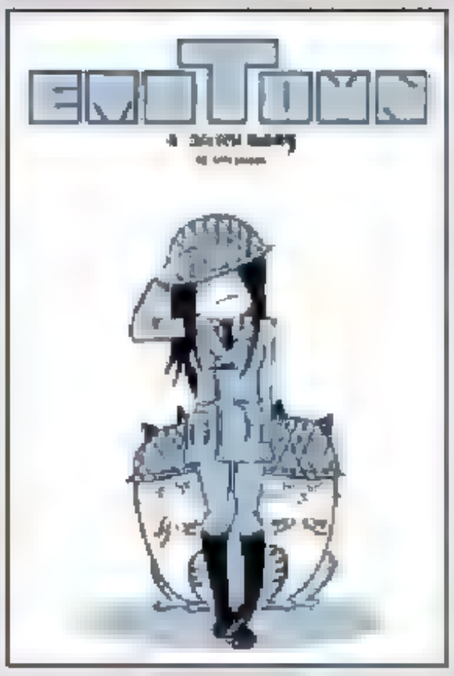
October also sees the release of Cornell's *Action Comics* #894, which pits Lex Luthor against Death of the Endless in a rare, Gaiman-sanctioned appearance. An instant must-buy!

If superheroes aren't your thing, DC's Vertigo line also has plenty in store, including September's *Daytripper* #10, which brings to a close the fantastic Vertigo maxi-series by Brazilian superstars Fábio Moon and Gabriel Ba, which has chronicled the various deaths of an obituary writer.

In October, the imprint has two more major releases: *Fables* #100 – a rare Vertigo centennial – and the much-anticipated *Vertigo Resurrected* #1, which contains the first publication of 'Shoot' (Warren Ellis's previously-shelved *Hellblazer* schoolyard-killing story), alongside rare work by Brian Bolland, Garth Ennis, Jim Lee, Peter Milligan and other top-name creators.

BELOW: Support a good cause with *Liberty Comics 2010*

INDIE SPOTLIGHT



EMITOWN

Released by Image in October, the 400-page *Emitown* TPB collection comprises a year's worth of entries from Emi Lenox's daily diary comic, as she experiences life in her hometown of Portland, Oregon. Whimsical, tragic, charming and honest, *Emitown* is slice-of-life cartooning that anyone can appreciate, available in print for the first time.

If you're more of a traditionalist, there's lots to look forward to November, when Jeff Lemire (*Sweet Tooth*) joins artist Pier Gallo to launch *Superboy* #1, a new series starring the recently resurrected Conner Kent.

INDEPENDENTS

Outside the big two, September's must-see book is undoubtedly Image's *Liquid City Vol 2* – the return of the anthology showcasing southeast Asia's finest manga and manhwa artists. Joss Whedon returns to kick off the five-part finale 'Last Gleaming' in Dark Horse's *Buffy* #36, featuring a certain peroxided vampire and no sparkling torsos. If sparkling torsos are your thing, perhaps Bluewater's *Fame. David Beckham* biographical comic will suffice. A desirable oddity in the making!

October sees everyone from Paul Pope to Rob Liefeld contributing to *Liberty Comics 2010*, the Comic Book Legal Defense Fund benefit book published by Image, with a talent pool so good it would be worth picking up even if it wasn't for charity. Dark Horse also releases the first TPB of *The Guild*, an in-continuity tie-in to Felicia Day's online comedy series with art by Jim Rugg (*Street Angel*).

Finally, November gives us a chance to see Stan Lee's latest creation in *Traveler* #1, from Boom! Studios (written by Mark Waid), while movie buffs will be interested in Dynamite man Kevin Smith's *Green Hornet Vol 1*, collecting the first part of Smith's adaptation of his own, unfilmed *Green Hornet* treatment. Last (but never least) Alan Martin and Rufus Dayglo bring back Tank Girl for another spin in *Tank Girl: Bad Wind Rising* #1, from Titan. Phew!

Text and images run in parallel, never touching.

A comic within a comic – we like!

DADDY ISSUES

A NEW DREAM

Stephen Jewell talks to artist extraordinaire Dave McKean about his new book, *Slog's Dad*

With its often separate use of words and illustration, Dave McKean and David Almond's *The Savage* was closer to an illustrated children's story than a traditional comic. Now, with *Slog's Dad*, the *Sandman* cover-artist and the *Skellig* author's second offering from Walker Books, the pair have produced a more seamless synthesis of the two mediums.

"I'm just trying to find the best way to tell the story," McKean tells *Comic Heroes*. "I don't mind what form that takes. Before I finished reading *The Savage* for the first time, I could already see the book and how it slipped in and out of comic book storytelling, with the blue/green colour scheme with one touch of red, and the loose style of the drawings perhaps reflecting (lead character) Blue's loose grip on reality."

ABOVE: Has a young boy's father returned from the grave?

However, the Kent-based artist envisioned *Slog's Dad*'s heartwarming account of a dead father returning from heaven for a day very differently to *The Savage*'s fable about school bullying. "I started to question who was telling the story, and why, and what an alternative reading of the text might be," reveals McKean, who adapted both tales from existing short stories.

"I thought it was unfair to force my alternative readings onto the text, but also crucial if I was going to make any kind of sense out of it in pictures. So I kept the text completely at arm's length from the pictures. They don't touch, they simply run in parallel, and it's up to the reader to tie together any or all of those connections. It meant that I was rewriting the story to a certain extent, but David was happy with the result. I can't remember seeing any other comic like it, but the end result grew out of the requirements of the story, not a desire to do something groundbreaking."

McKean has also just made the finishing touches to a digitally remastered new edition of his Harvey Award-winning graphic novel *Cages*, which is scheduled be published by Dark Horse in October after being out of print for nearly a decade. He believes that the Kafka-esque tale of the intersecting lives of a musician, a painter and a filmmaker is still very relevant to readers today.

"Religious intolerance and the fear of causing offence hasn't changed since the Salman Rushdie affair," McKean says. "My own feelings about belief, or rather, lack of belief, have strengthened. But [the book] will be coming out in a very different landscape than when it was first published. A new generation of creators, who are completely untainted by mainstream Marvel and DC stuff, now regard comics as a powerful medium for self-expression. That's all I hoped it would become when I first did *Cages* 20 years ago. I'm curious to see how it will strike a chord with a 21st century readership." CH

"I STARTED TO QUESTION WHO WAS TELLING THE STORY, AND WHY"

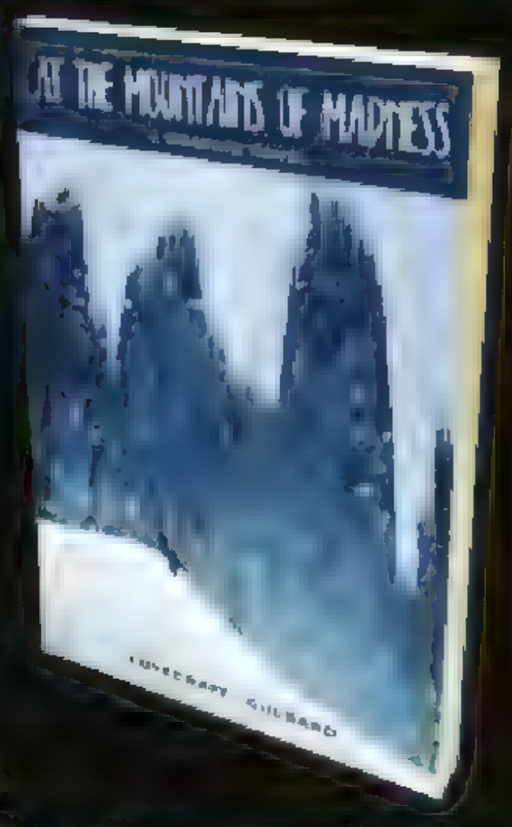
DAVE McKEAN

H.P. LOVECRAFT | I.N.J. CULBARD

AT THE MOUNTAINS OF MADNESS

A GRAPHIC NOVEL

"I could not help feeling that they were evil things – mountains of madness whose farther slopes looked out over some accursed ultimate abyss"



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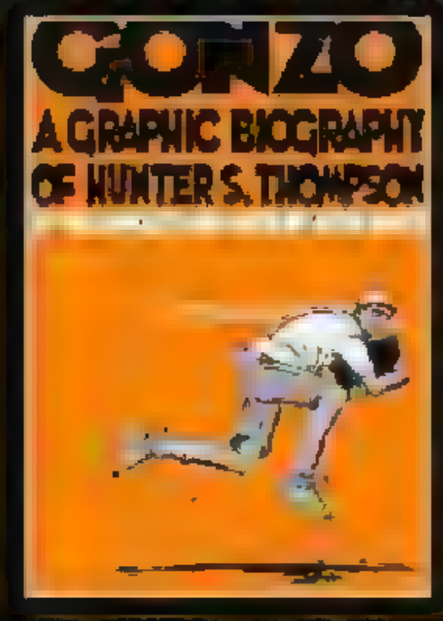

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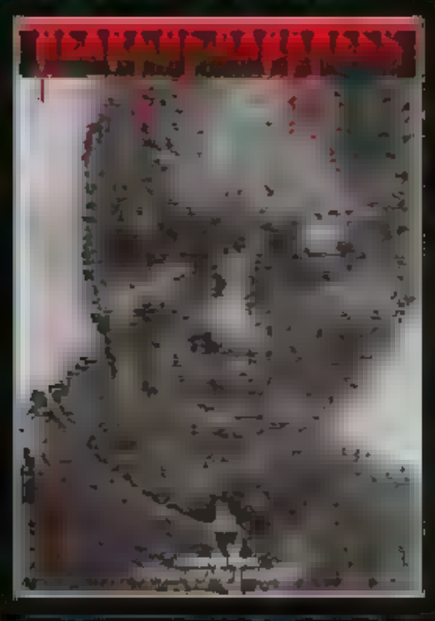

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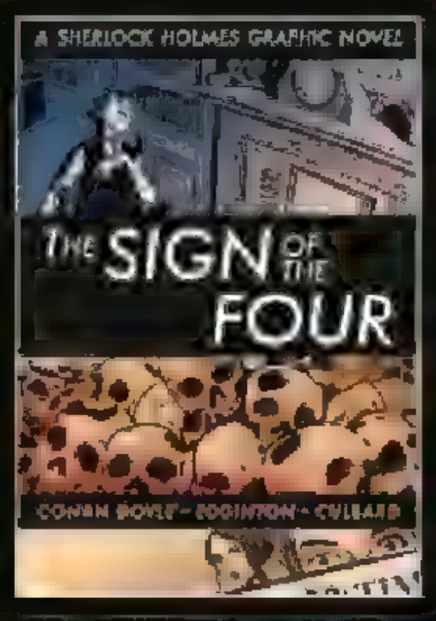

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ABOVE: Every man has his idol. Tony Lee cosies up to Peter David

COMIC-CON

ACROSS THE SEA

Comics writer and gentleman **Tony Lee** shares his experience of the recent San Diego Comic-Con with *Comic Heroes*...

Six years ago, I first travelled across the giant ocean that we laughingly call the pond to visit the 2005 San Diego Comic-Con. Having at that point only experienced the Bristol Expo in terms of my 'this is what a convention is' understanding, the sudden explosion of size, noise and general attendance of SDCC was incredible and mind-blowing. Six years on, it still hasn't changed for me.

Everyone knows that Comic-Con is huge, but people don't really realise just how big it is. Take six American football pitches. Place them side by side. That's the exhibitor hall. It's easily a quarter of a mile long, and that's not including the panel rooms and grand halls on the floor above, all of which you'll find yourself walking back and forth between along continuous, cosplay-filled corridors that seem to stretch on forever.

BELOW: Strangely out-of-proportion Stormtroopers: so cute

And did I mention outside? Yes, the event's now too big for the mammoth convention centre. This year, there were panels and events at the adjacent Hilton the Hard Rock Hotel's cafe was rebranded Cafe Die by the Syfy channel and there was a fallen army chopper and a *Green Hornet* car next to the *Scott Pilgrim* theme park. The entirety of downtown San Diego is now Comic-Con fodder for the masses.

AND I LOVE IT

2010 was the year everyone decided that movies had finally taken over Comic-Con, with giant billboards covering entire hotel fronts and swanky celebrity parties that nobody could get into. But Comic-Con has been like this forever. There have always been the elitist parties and must-have tickets. Comics have always been there and accounted for, it's just that the movies shout louder.

This year was supposed to be my quiet year. After five years of solidly pitching to every editor known to man, this time I wasn't in need of work. It was a chance to simply catch up with friends. But things don't work that way.

On the Thursday, Rich Johnston of Bleeding Cool (www.bleedingcool.com) got wind that my AAM/Markosia graphic novel *From The Pages Of Bram Stoker's Dracula: Harker* was being optioned, and on Friday I woke to countless congratulatory emails. Of course, my agent was suddenly emailing me with lists of people who, hearing the news, wanted to see what else I had out there to show.

I found myself spending more and more time away from the exhibition floor,

These attendees look pretty chuffed at being stuck in Tron.
Gaslamp Quarter
Qualcomm Stadium
Gillespie Field
The Gaslamp Quarter takes on a whole new meaning.
January. The Eleventh Doctor. Save the date.

"2010 WAS THE YEAR EVERYONE DECIDED THAT MOVIES HAD FINALLY TAKEN OVER COMIC-CON"

which is often a good idea during on a weekend SDCC rush. I don't know how many people came to Comic-Con – I know we were easily 50k over the convent on limit, the people without passes simply hanging around the Gaslamp and soaking in the ambience.

With only two pedestrian crossings to cross the freeway on, simply entering downtown San Diego from the centre became a military operation, and I spent most of my weekend ensconced in either the Hard Rock Hotel, Marriott or Omni lobby bars. For the last three days, I had a pass to the Omni Hotel's WIRED Cafe, where HBO-sponsored *True Blood* cocktails ran as freely as the Wi-fi, snacks and occasional goodie trays of DVD box sets. I felt like I'd entered Willy Wonka's magical chocolate factory. To the beautiful people of TV and film, however, this was simply expected.

NETWORKING CENTRAL

My convention was very *Doctor Who*-centric. IDW Publishing announced the new *Eleventh Doctor* series by me and Matthew Dow Smith, starting in January, and the signing on the Sunday broke all *Doctor Who* records for the company, which was great.

I pitched *Danger Academy* (created with Dan Boultwood) quite successfully, and discussed movie options for *Sherlock Holmes: The Baker Street Irregulars*. I also got to meet one of my idols, Peter David, when we sat on a panel, and finally met Stan Sakai, creator of *Usagi Yojimbo*. We've spoken, but never face to face.

I've had meetings with comics publishers every year at SDCC, but this time I tasted the 'celebrity' life and found it to be mildly insane. I'm writing a book with Alaina Huffman (of *Stargate Universe* and *Smallville* fame) called *Agent Mom*. We've been working on it since the May MCM Expo in London, and SDCC was the point where we discussed character designs with a couple of artists, as well as met Sean O'Reilly of Arcana, who'll be publishing the novel.

But during the conversation, MTV Digital arrived and chatted with us. Eric Estrada and Lou Ferrigno came over to say hello, and by the end of the meeting three TV producers had expressed interest in *Agent Mom*, even though we hadn't even talked to them. Television is a faster-moving rollercoaster of a ride, and I can see why Comic-Con is a good fit for it. More happened on *Agent Mom* in one day than in six months of anything else I'm currently working on.

The Brits arrived in force, but with countless parties a night and a dozen hotel bars to choose from, I barely saw anyone. I spotted Paul Cornell and Jock and Frazer Irving in bars, Sean Phillips and Duncan Fegredo at a diner, Liam Sharp in a shopping mall and Ben McCool, Kieron Gillen and Jamie McKelvie at the CBLDF party. That's Comic-Con.

San Diego gets more insane every year, but it's your one-stop-shop for every producer you need to progress your product. And in this media-centric world, you need all the help you can get.

Me? I'll be back next year... CH

ABOVE: Swept up in the buzz, even the Stormtroopers got their bling on

THE SKINNY: FREELANCING

Low pay, long hours and the chance that someone else will take the glory. Comics guru Dez Skinn lifts the lid on the less-than-glamorous side of the industry...

Freelance: Sir Walter Scott is credited with creating the term. Originally, a free-lance was a mercenary medieval warrior, somebody whose lance was not in any lord's service. These days, it hasn't changed much at all. Sure, the lance may have morphed into a keyboard and the lord into an editor, but it's still not dedicated. A freelance writer, artist, colourist or letterer can work for anybody who'll have them.

But there is one major difference. A medieval freelance would continually wander the countryside in search of work, these days, they don't get out much. In fact, were it not for Tesco stores and comic conventions, they probably wouldn't get out at all!

THE INVISIBLE MAN

A lot of comics readers envy writers and artists. They see them at conventions being lionised and eulogised, whether on stage or as the focal point of queues, signing and sketching for their public. These are the true comic heroes: the creators.

But that's only one or two weekends of the year. With the exception of a larger-than-life Hagrid look-alike who rarely strays, they're virtually invisible to the general public when they do the shopping. Because it's not a proper job, really, is it? They work from home, so they're always the first call if one of their children falls over at school. Because don't fool yourself into believing that it's such a luxurious lifestyle that their income alone is sufficient to maintain the entire family. No way. The other half invariably works, too – except they go out to earn a crust.

The freelancer doesn't. They stay in. Working at home, living at home, seven days a week... freelance. No paid holidays, no paid sick leave, no Christmas parties, no office gossip. In fact, no real perks except being able to wear your jammies all day.

I've always had the highest respect for people who can maintain the life of a freelancer. The self-discipline needed is truly awesome. Take John Wagner, for instance. For the best part of 33 years – week in, week out – this guy has been producing a new *Judge Dredd* strip for *2000 AD*, plus more than a few spin-offs. Like most folk, he'll have had weeks when he felt under the weather, or had personal problems, but he's still maintained an incredibly high standard. On time, all the time. And if you've met six-foot-something John, you'll know he's not the type of person that editors would cajole to keep on time. It's down to a strict regime of self-discipline.

UP TO SCRATCH

An American comics scribe once summed up what it's like being a freelance writer by saying, "You can never deliver top-quality scripts every time. Sometimes I write average stuff, sometimes below average, but every once in a while a script turns out fantastic." Let's hope his editor never saw that. But what are they to do if a regular writer (or artist or colourist) turns in a sub-standard piece of work? These people are continually on the eleventh hour of deadlines. There's no point in them even thinking of getting a few issues ahead – cashflow won't allow for early payment, so even if they have the time and inclination, they won't see any financial reward for months.

It's easy to criticise somebody's work, to say, "I could do better". But could you do better month in, month out, on time and on budget for years? Initial *Conan The Barbarian* artist Barry Windsor Smith suddenly quit drawing the title because he said he wasn't being paid enough for the amount of work he put in. It's true: he wasn't.

In under two years, he'd gone from being influenced by Jack Kirby to his pre-Raphaelite stage, highly meticulous in detail and mannered in style. Beautiful and groundbreaking for the comics medium, but impossible to maintain. In fact, impossible to ink, too! When the inker was handed the finely pencilled *Conan* pages and said there was no way he could get it done on time, the editor suggested he simply replace some of the fantastic backgrounds with either simple horizons and sunsets, or just rubbed them out and left the characters as vignettes. Poor Barry. Is it any wonder he quit?

So, when Windsor Smith was replaced by Big John Buscema on *Conan* #25, fans felt let down. Buscema had more raw power in his figure work than Smith, but where was all of the fantastic detail? But Buscema continued producing *Conan* on a regular basis for more than a decade.

CAUSE FOR RESPECT

To allow for the likes of such visionaries as Neal Adams, Jim Steranko, Bernie Wrightson or Barry Windsor Smith, you need a legion of solid, reliable artists such as Curt Swan, Jim Aparo, Norm Breyfogle, John Romita and the like to maintain the schedule, decade after decade.

Without them, there would be no backbone titles to revolutionise. And, even worse, when these visionaries have awed and amazed the fans with their blow-away four-parters, the guys who've been keeping the title going until then and have to carry on after the award-winning interruptions seem somehow slightly diminished in their standing.

But these are the freelancers that I truly respect the most. The often unsung comic heroes who month in, month out produce dependable, rock-solid work.

Another reason these guys are always in work: they make the editor's life easier. So if you're looking for a career in comics, never underestimate that!

DEZ SKINN

> **“NO PAID HOLIDAYS, NO PAID SICK LEAVE, NO CHRISTMAS PARTIES, NO OFFICE GOSSIP. IN FACT, NO REAL PERKS EXCEPT BEING ABLE TO WEAR YOUR JAMMIES ALL DAY”**

THE VIEW FROM A BOARD

Mike Perkins, artist on Stephen King's *The Stand* from Marvel, explains why *The New Teen Titans* took him from teenage fandom to collaborating with his heroes

For the majority of people in any number of professions, the chance to meet up with their heroes, inspirations or celebrated talents are few and far between – often inconceivable. For those of us lucky enough to be employed in the jobs that we've dreamed about since we were young whippersnappers, it's almost predestined that not only will we meet our exalted idols, but we may even have the chance to actually collaborate with them to some degree.

I was first introduced to *The New Teen Titans* by accident – stumbling across a copy of an issue in one of those pokey newsagents that you never seem to find any more. It was *Tales Of The New Teen Titans*, with the spotlight on Starfire. Aah... Starfire. Who among us didn't fancy Starfire, the golden-haired, bronze-bodied, green-eyed alien from Tamaran?

I'm sure I must have come across the works of Marv Wolfman and George Perez before in the Marvel UK reprints, but this was the first time I sat up and took notice. (Actually, I retract that comment, as I have an illustration of Deathlok, drawn by me when I was eight years old, clearly copied from a Perez *Marvel Two-in-One* cover.)

The next time I came across the *Teen Titans* was just after the high-quality direct market 'Baxter' book was released. I'd started a Saturday job in the Wolverhampton comic shop – The Place – and fell in love with Mr Perez's artwork. So much so that I purchased all of the back issues of *The New Teen Titans* – going back some six or so years – and, due to this, probably kept the shop afloat for longer than had been previously expected!

Skip forward 15 years, and I had just started to work alongside Mr Perez, inking his work on the *CrossGen Chronicles*. This led to me moving to Florida, meeting George (I can call him that now!) and subsequently being asked to embellish the remaining pages of the *Teen Titans. Games* graphic novel. Talk about being a fanboy all over again! Wait... wait. It gets even better .

One of the facets the original run of the Perez/Wolfman *Teen Titans* was most famous for was the close collaboration between the two prime movers – resulting in the co-plotting

"STUMBLED ACROSS A COPY OF AN ISSUE IN ONE OF THOSE POKEY NEWSAGENTS THAT YOU NEVER SEEM TO FIND ANY MORE"

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WHERE THE ACTION

of the issues. I always had this fanciful idea of the two of them meeting up in some seedy New York diner to discuss the finer points of Dick and Kori's romance or the Machiavellian machinations and shocking revelations of 'The Judas Contract'. The seediness of the diner may have been wide of the mark, but these clandestine meetings and secret discussions indisputably took place

At the Megacon in Orlando this year, when I went down to the restaurant, I was asked to join Mr George Perez and Mr Marv Wolfman for breakfast in order to discuss the finer plot points of the *Games* graphic novel with them. I was 15 years old again, and probably didn't offer much by way of conversation as I was so thrilled to be a part of that close collaboration with two people who were influential in not only my comic consumption, but also my creative inspiration.

Sometimes we get to meet our heroes, sometimes we get to collaborate with them and sometimes, just maybe, we get to create something particularly special with them.

■ ***The Stand: Hardcases*** **issue five will be in comic stores this November.**

DON'T TALK TO ME ABOUT HEROES

One-man comics rumour mill Rich Johnston dishes the dirt in his first regular column for *Comic Heroes*...

When I say I'm a comic book industry gossip columnist, I usually get asked if I write about Superman sleeping with Wonder Woman behind Lois Lane's back. The idea that comic book industry people might act in exactly the same way as their Hollywood equivalents is a non-starter – but I've been writing about them for 15 years. Here are a few favourite targets, with their identifying features filed off to give Future Publishing's lawyers an easy life...

◆ The comic book creator who owns a farm and is paid rent by its occupants in the form of a familiar illegal substance.

◆ The publisher having a relationship with the wife of one of his artists. Who then went on holiday with another publisher doing the exact same thing.

◆ The shy and retiring comics publisher who many suspected of being gay, if not asexual, who successfully chatted up a brunette bombshell at Comic-Con in San Diego this year – with all jaws dropping as he walked off into the night with her.

◆ The on-again-off-again comics couple who went to a convention in Europe for their publisher, but then also charged for a very naughty diversion for a few nights in Amsterdam.

◆ The two comic creators who ended up in a fist-and-bottle fight at a previous San Diego Comic-Con bar after one made suggestive comments and actions towards the other's wife and niece, causing the bar staff to summon the local constabulary.

◆ The CEO of a major comics company who told the editor-in-chief (and proud father) that anyone who had children that turned out to be gay should kill them.

◆ The comics creator who, if he got out of hand, convention staff were instructed to find a redhead – any redhead – to calm him down. And it worked a treat.

◆ The comics creator who got caught tracing from porn mags for a Catwoman/Poison Ivy fight scene

◆ The comics publisher who awoke in a hotel room to find his comics creator room companion being pleasured by a fangirl, forcing the publisher to feign sleep for another hour.

◆ The comics creator who, high on drugs, accidentally fouled his white suit on a first-class flight to Japan.

◆ The executive at another major company with a human resources file full-to-bursting with sexual and racial harassment allegations, yet knows so much about the company history that the company keep him employed rather than risk exposure or having to pay a very large gagging order.

◆ The comic executive who, denied a trip to a Chicago comic convention, was arrested after a drink-driving collision on the same weekend.

◆ So, comics people are just like Hollywood people. But with less money. Which somehow makes everything much, much worse...

RICH JOHNSTON
August 2010

■ Rich runs the website *bleedingcool.com*, which should be your first stop for any comic-related news and rumours.

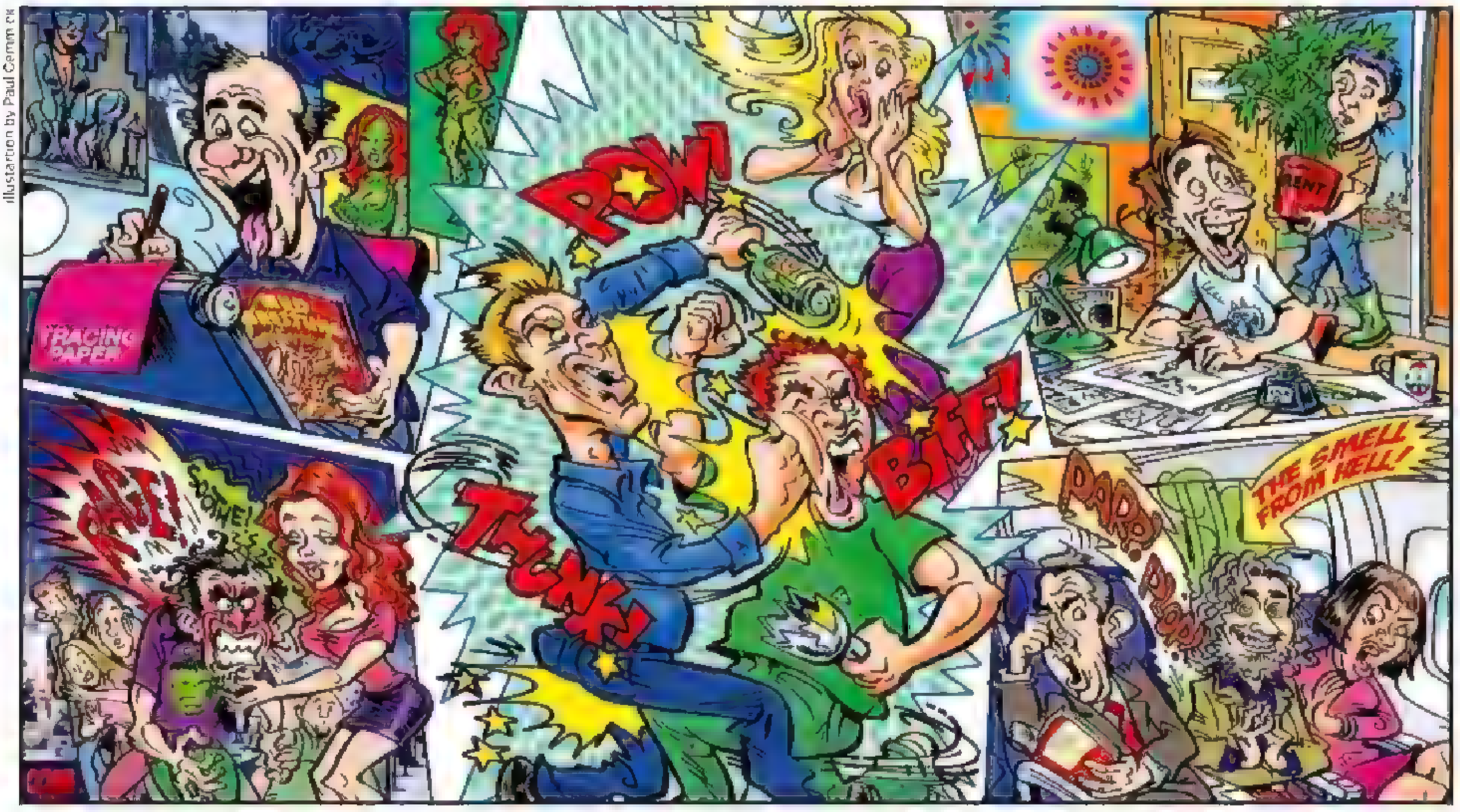

Illustration by Paul Gemmell

STOP PRESS!

Some last minute news squeezed in just as we were going to print...

Dan Boultwood and Ciaran Lucas have been announced as the art team on Tony Lee and Alanna Huffman's *Agent Mom*. Boultwood and Lee are also doing *The Gloom* with MTV in October.

The Eagle awards will be held on Friday 29th October at the MCM Expo in London.

COMPETITION!

WIN! TICKETS TO BICS 2010

This year's British International Comics Show over the weekend on October 16-17 is getting closer, and 2010's incredible international guestlist is the largest since the show began in 2006.

Some of the most renowned artists and writers from all over the globe, as well as here in the UK, will be appearing for signings, exclusive interviews and guest panels.

Artists including Tommy Lee Edwards, Peter Gross, Charles Vess and Bryan Hitch will also be discussing their work and revealing secrets to fans during live events, as well as launching new books.

Some of the industry's top writers will be on hand, too, including the likes of Paul Cornell, Mike Cary and Dave Hine.

Other top names in attendance will include Australia's Nicola Scott, Japan's Yuko Shimizu, Turkey's Mahmud A Asrar and Canada's Yanick Paquette, not to mention some of the UK's most respected creators including *Walking Dead*'s Charlie Adlard, *Hellboy*'s Duncan Fegredo, *Criminal*'s Sean Phillips and the legendary Dave Gibbons of *Watchmen* fame, plus many many more.

The now-legendary Friday night BICS launch party is also back this year, with all guests, exhibitors and early pre-registered attendees receiving free entry to Birmingham's popular Oceana nightclub, as well as access to a special VIP area. Is there any better way for fans to kick off their weekend of comics heaven than mingling with their favourite comic creators? We can't think of any...

To find out more about BICS or to book tickets visit the official website at www.thecomicsshow.co.uk.

But wait! There's a chance to get in for free because, thanks to those lovely folks behind the scenes at BICS, we've got tickets to the show to give away to two lucky winners – including access to the launch party! The tickets allow you to bring guests, too – up to the number allowed by a BICS family ticket (find out more at the show's website).

To enter, simply look at the following question and text the correct answer code to 87474, or enter online by clicking on the competition tab at www.sfx.co.uk – where you'll also find the full terms and conditions. Best of luck!

Q: WHICH MARVEL SUPERHERO UTTERED THE IMMORTAL LINE: "I'M THE BEST THERE IS AT WHAT I DO. BUT WHAT I DO ISN'T VERY NICE."

A. Wolverine (text **BICS A** to 87474)
B. Cyclops (text **BICS B** to 87474)
C. Toad (text **BICS C** to 87474)

TO ENTER *Comic Heroes* competitions you can either (a) text your answer to 87474 at any time (using the codes above) from Thursday 16 September until Midnight Tuesday 5 October 2010 or (b) you can enter online at www.sfx.co.uk between Thursday 16 September and midnight Tuesday 5 October 2010. This competition is only open to people aged 18 or over. The winners will be selected at random from all the correct entries received between the relevant dates and winners will be notified within 28 days of the closing date. Winners will be required to give details of a delivery address in the UK to which prizes should be sent. Texts will be charged at 50 pence, plus your normal network tariff. Free entry, as well as full terms and conditions, are available online at www.sfx.co.uk but please note that we can not accept postal entries. Unless otherwise stated, *Comic Heroes* competitions are open to all UK residents of 18 years and over, except employees of: (a) the Company; (b) any third party appointed by the Company to organise and/or manage the Competition, and (c) the Competition sponsor(s). By entering this competition, you consent to us using your personal details to send you information about products and services of Future which may be of interest to you. If you do not want to receive this information please include the word "NO" at the end of your text message entry.

WALKING WITH ZOMBIES

Comic Heroes talks to creator-writer Robert Kirkman and artist Charlie Adlard about _The Walking Dead_, the tale of a group struggling to survive a zombie apocalypse – which is also coming soon to a TV near you. By Daniel Etherington

Apocalyptic fiction has long been a popular staple, with innumerable woes – nuclear, viral, bacterial, floral, aquatic and alien – leading to human civilisation's demise. One favourite means of human (near) extinction is, of course, the zombie plague. This is setting for _The Walking Dead_, the epic comic book tale of a small group of survivors having to deal with not just the millions of hungry ghouls sniffing them out, but also with that bigger threat: man's inhumanity to man. It's a subject that writer Robert Kirkman, who created the comic book back in 2003 with artist Tony Moore, explores in great detail.

Indeed, _TWD_ is a treat for fans of all things apocalyptic or zombie-based, because this level of detail is in many ways unprecedented. A classic apocalyptic novel can have an epic scope, but when it's done, it's done. Movies, meanwhile, generally last less than two hours. Even the man who shaped the zombie genre, George A Romero, is constrained by the requirements of cinema – a concise plot and a certain number of characters. Romero's zombie-ravaged world still hasn't been explored in great detail, despite the ever-expanding _Living Dead_ series (now running to six films and counting). In fact, Romero's best films are the ones with the narrowest focus – with survivors holed up in a house or shopping mall.

The Walking Dead, in many ways, fills this gap, taking time to show us around a zombie-infested world. It recently reached issue 75 and looks set to stay with us a long time yet – not least because it's also being adapted for television with AMC, the network behind _Mad Men_. "We've got Frank Darabont, we've got Gale Anne Hurd," enthuses artist Charlie Adlard (who took over from Moore from issue seven), emphasising the show's genre credentials. Kirkman, meanwhile, is executive producing the show alongside these luminaries. "I plan on being as involved in the TV show as working on the comic will let me," he says. "I don't want to stop writing the comic, or even take a break from the comic during the run of the show, because it's what made the show possible and I really want to reward people who have stuck by it and supported it for years." He does hope that he'll be able to "write an episode or two every season," though.

GLOBAL EPIDEMIC

The comic book started out "being read by 7,000 people, and now it's being read by 30,000 people for the single issues." This figure may well soar come the arrival of the TV series, but Kirkman's not feeling the pressure. "No, luckily I don't really think of it that way," he says. "I'm really happy about it and I'm hoping that it'll lead to more success for the book, just because I'd like to continue writing it for another couple of decades. If the TV show will facilitate that, then all »

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the better." Which is fantastic news for fans, because Kirkman's always maintained that, when you're writing an apocalyptic story, it's not the event itself that's of interest, it's what comes after – survival. It's something that's already provided the comic book with an array of intense, harsh storylines (see 'The Story So Far', p27).

Kirkman began the main story after the plague had already destroyed civilisation – with protagonist Rick Grimes waking up from a coma in a hospital bed. Sound familiar? Yep, it's closely comparable to the scene that introduces the protagonist in *28 Days Later*, whose writer, Alex Garland, freely admitted to borrowing from John Wyndham's *The Day Of The Triffids*. "That's the unfortunate coincidence that haunts me to this day," says Kirkman. "I thought it

LEFT: Zombies are often the least of your worries in *The Walking Dead*.

RIGHT: Some lovely Adlard art. We're huge fans of the comic's monochrome style.

"THERE ARE LOTS OF THINGS HE'S DOING THAT DON'T SEEM LIKE THINGS A GOOD MAN WOULD DO"

was a novel way of staying with one character and learning the world with him, without having to experience all of the beginnings of the story, which I always thought was boring. In my defence, *28 Days Later* was released in the US in June 2003 when we were well into creating our comic. It's just an unfortunate bit of timing." As for Wyndham's novel? "I wasn't even aware of *The Day Of The Triffids*."

Kirkman's comic soon moved on to become a very different endeavour to these British genre excursions, with protagonist Rick joining and taking charge of a group of survivors he finds outside Atlantic City, and living in the remains of a broken civilisation. As Kirkman explains, "Romero is a very prominent influence on *The Walking Dead*, just in the way of handling characters and the portrayal of zombies – which is hopefully respectfully upheld in *TWD*." However, he's also concerned with portrayals of social collapse from real human history. "I tried to take some cues from holocaust movies," he says, "just because that's one of the few cases that shows how real people would react during that sort of situation. Europe during World War 2 showed a breakdown of society and how people deal with that kind of stuff."

As such, *TWD* is concerned with the real world, and realistic human behaviour. Behaviour that's frequently very bleak, especially when Rick and his group encounter other, threatening survivors. "We're far crueller to each other than any monster is," says Adlard. Take, for example, the story arc involving the Governor, a psychopath leading another group of survivors, who brutalises Rick and his comrade Michonne. He's one of the nastiest villains to be found in comics, and yet, as the comic progresses, Rick's own behaviour becomes comparably brutal – in the 'Fear The Hunters' arc, Rick orders that a group of cannibals are not just killed, but mutilated. One

WHO'S WHO

TWD has an extensive cast of characters, which shifts constantly due to high mortality rates...

RICK GRIMES
Cop from the small Kentucky town of Cynthiana. He missed the apocalypse itself, but then takes charge of a group of survivors. Portrayed by Andrew Lincoln in the TV series.

LORI GRIMES
Rick's wife – they're reunited in Atlanta. Gets pregnant near the start of the zombie apocalypse.

CARL GRIMES
Rick and Lori's son, who's seven when the zombie plague breaks out. He isn't experiencing a normal, wholesome childhood.

SHANE
Former colleague and best friend of Rick. He had an affair with Lori while Rick was in hospital in Cynthiana.

DALE
A retired car salesman who becomes a lover to Andrea and a father figure to Rick. His RV is much-used by the survivors.

GLENN
A core member of the group, and close comrade of Rick. An expert scavenger.

ANDREA
Another core member of the group that formed outside Atlanta. Loses her sister Amy early on, takes up with Dale and discovers a talent with guns.

HERSHEL GREENE
Owner of a farm where Rick and the Atlanta group stay. Has veterinary experience that comes in handy with human wounds. Loses most of his seven kids in quick succession.

MAGGIE GREENE
Daughter of Hershel. She and Glenn fall in love at Hershel's farm and are later married.

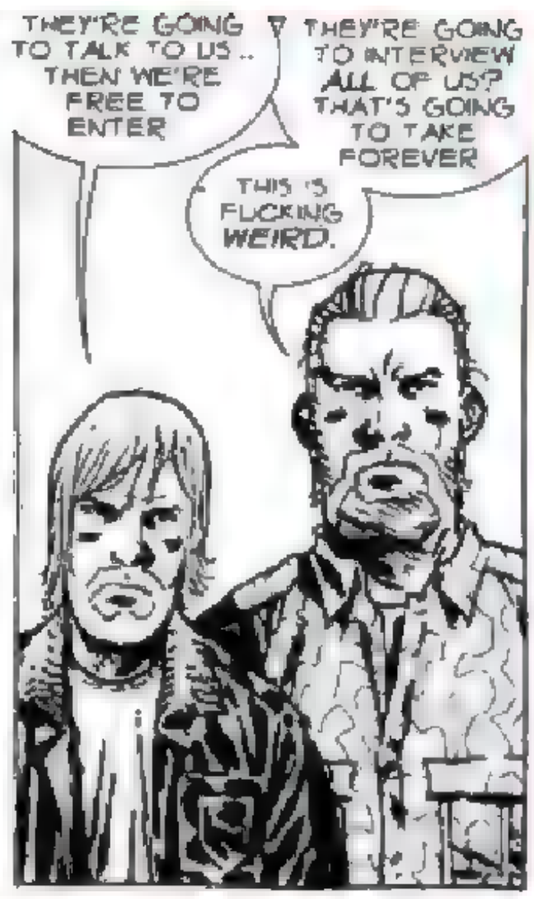
MICHONNE
A former lawyer who joins the group and proves herself one of the toughest fighters – notably for her skills with a katana.

TYRESE
A former NFL American football player, he's a dab hand with a hammer but useless with a gun. Has a strong bond with Rick, though they come to blows.

ABRAHAM
A former sergeant in the US Army. A rival to Rick for leadership of the group, but the pair eventually bond over a shared understanding of what it takes to survive in the post-apocalyptic world. Resembles Hulk Hogan.

EUGENE
Part of Abraham's group, which combines with Rick's group. Ostensibly a scientist with inside knowledge about what caused the zombie plague. Wears his hair in a mullet.

MORGAN
A survivor Rick meets early on. They cross paths again around a year later, when Morgan joins Rick's group.


THEY'RE GOING TO TALK TO US.. THEN WE'RE FREE TO ENTER
THEY'RE GOING TO INTERVIEW ALL OF US? THAT'S GOING TO TAKE FOREVER
THIS IS FUCKING WEIRD.

of the comic's main themes, then, is how savagery can be a requirement for survival. But it also asks where you draw the line, and questions the effects of that savagery. "What Robert does, and what I enjoy, is the blurring of black and white," says Adlard. "There certainly aren't any perfectly good guys in this, or any perfectly bad guys. Everyone is human. You just look at what's happening to Rick at the moment, you can see something horrible's going to come along, something quite shocking hopefully." The zombies, therefore, are more a backdrop to the intense human drama; Kirkman calls them "a means to an end," while Adlard says they can never themselves be great antagonists because they're "more of a disease rather than an actual malevolence."

So is Rick even a 'hero'? "That's not really a question I can answer," says Kirkman. "He's definitely the protagonist, and the story follows him and is from his perspective. But yeah, if you give it a second thought – and that's deliberate – there are lots of things that he's doing now that don't seem like the sort of things a good guy would do.

"That's the fun of the book – being able to see these characters grow and change over time. Rick's gone from this goody-two-shoes small-town cop who wants to do the right thing to this guy who'll now do anything he can to protect his child. And he's starting to have a skewed perspective about what needs to be done in order to protect his child. So he's becoming rather dangerous, to be honest."

Ah yes, Rick's child. Rick's son is Carl, a young boy who is starting to forget the old world, even forgetting any sort of a normal childhood. "If we had 100 years in which to tell this story, it would eventually metamorphose into Carl's story," says Adlard. "It's arguably a much more interesting character arc, because you're taking a completely innocent, blank canvas, and creating, moulding

ABOVE: People – are they worse than zombies? Despite the brain-eating, they sometimes are.

BELOW: Tony Moore was *The Walking Dead*'s original artist.

"THERE CERTAINLY AREN'T ANY PERFECTLY GOOD GUYS IN THIS, OR PERFECTLY BAD GUYS. EVERYONE IS HUMAN"

TRANS-ATLANTIC COMICS CREATION

Although *The Walking Dead* was co-created by Kirkman and original artist Tony Moore, Charlie Adlard, whose bold, emotive black and white artwork first appeared in April 2004's issue seven, has proved "perfect for it," in Kirkman's words. "The way he does emotion, his sense of timing, panel design. It's remarkable how much he adds to the book."

The trans-Atlantic arrangement isn't always easy, though. "There was one time recently when I asked for a character to look 'pissed', and over here, it's 'angry, pissed off', but over there it means 'drunk'," Kirkman chuckles. "I got the page back and was like 'What the Hell is going on?'"

Kirkman will occasionally send Adlard specific reference material – "road signs and shots of windows" – but for the most part the British artist relies on "a lot of Googling" and imagination. "Having been brought up on American movies and TV, much of it's ingrained anyway," says Adlard. "And because it's the apocalypse, you can stick a lot of rubbish in there!

"Something like issue 69, I think, when they're in Washington DC, which is probably the most complicated issue I've had to do, a lot of that was taken straight from photographs. I didn't want to fudge Washington!"

Adlard and Kirkman are obviously doing something right, because the comic's been around six years. "It'd be nice to go down in history as one of the top five guys that's stayed on a book," laughs Adlard. "It'd be nice to achieve the Jack Kirby or Eduardo Risso 100 [issues of *100 Bullets*], which is looking plausible."

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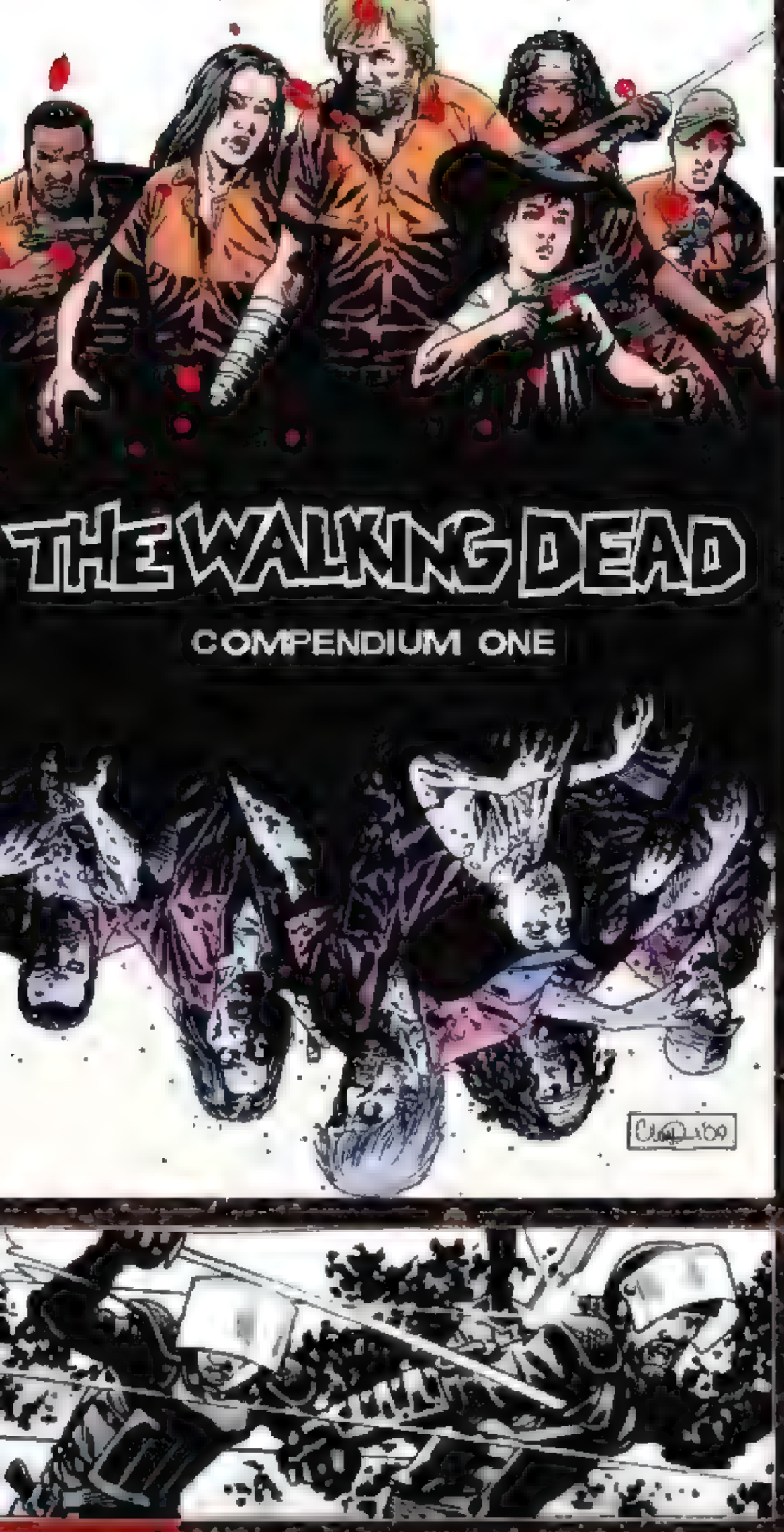

a character right from the start." Kirkman, meanwhile, says: "He's this young kid who's lived through these horrors; it's aged him and made him grow more mature than he should be. He takes certain things as being normal that other people think are horrific – things that should never happen." The comics even see Carl shooting and killing other humans.

Kirkman's certainly not afraid of controversial issues then, but most of all he's concerned with creating a compelling narrative-based drama and, frankly, despite how grim *TWD*'s world may be, creating it must be a lot of fun. Let's be honest – fans of apocalyptic stories love to fantasise about such things, and *TWD* is the ultimate extrapolation of this.

Kirkman concurs: "It's really kinda cool to play 'what if?' What if society were to crumble – would I be able to survive? Would I be able to find my friends? Would I build a community? Just think about not having to pay off your debts or heating bills. Never having to go to the grocery store again. Never having to go to a dinner party you don't want to go to. It's kinda fun to just imagine what things would be like..."

LEFT: The massive *Compendium One* collects the first 48 issues of the comic!

RIGHT: The old 'eyeball on the cheek' is never a sign that things are going well.

He continues: "I definitely have a good time writing it, or I wouldn't have written so many issues. Sometimes, when something really horrific happens in the book, I'm affected by that. I don't exactly revel in all the mayhem. But that said, it's exactly what I got into comics to do: to be able to write my own stories and tell them at my pace, and continue a book for as long as I want without any outside interference."

Fans can look forward to the arrival of the TV series, with a new Rick played by British actor Andrew Lincoln, alongside the ongoing comic where the old Rick is falling apart bit by bit. "As we go forward, he'll either come back from the edge, or completely fall over it," says Kirkman. "That's what's interesting about the story for me – that we can see his personality collapse and rebuild itself over time, and it's a question of where that will take us. Hopefully that's the compelling part of the book."

It'll certainly be an interesting time for Kirkman, seeing his baby realised in full colour (the comic's artwork is black and white) with flesh and blood actors. "That's really exciting to me, seeing like an alternate version of all these characters, and different things happening to them, and different outcomes to their actions," says Kirkman. "I'm not used to picturing Rick Grimes as a real person; I'm used to picturing Rick Grimes as drawings. I haven't yet starting picturing Andrew Lincoln or any of the other members of the cast when I'm writing the comic but I can see that happening as time goes on."

"HE'S THIS YOUNG KID WHO'S LIVED THROUGH THESE HORRORS; IT'S AGED HIM AND MADE HIM GROW MORE MATURE"

THE STORY SO FAR

First published in comic form in 2003, *The Walking Dead* is now up to 12 collected volumes. Here's an inevitably spoiler-filled summary...

Vol 1
DAYS GONE BYE #1-6

Small town cop Rick Grimes wakes from a coma and discovers that the world has succumbed to a zombie plague. A survivor called Morgan points him towards Atlanta, where Rick is miraculously reunited with his wife Lori and son Carl, as well as his partner Shane. They're part of a small group of survivors, which Rick soon takes charge of. After a few zombie attacks, tensions rise between Rick and Shane, with terrible consequences.

Vol 2
MILES BEHIND US #7-12

With winter coming and a huge population of zombies in the ruins of Atlanta, Rick insists the group move somewhere safer. The dozen survivors hit the road in Dale's RV. Along the way, they meet Tyreese. A gated community appears to offer a haven, but is full of zombies. The group escapes, but not without a fatality. Carl is shot in a hunting accident. Farmer Hershel helps save the boy, but when he and Rick have a disagreement, the group is forced to move on again.

Vol 3
SAFETY BEHIND BARS #13-18

The group move into a prison. With its fences, guard towers and solid accommodation blocks, it looks like a perfect home/fortress. Led by Rick and Tyreese, they clear out the zombies. They also meet the four remaining living inmates. Rick returns to Hershel's farm to invite him and his family to join them at the prison. All is not rosy though – Tyreese loses his daughter, then vicious murders start occurring. Rick insists that they execute the murderer but instead he's shot by Maggie, whose younger sisters he had murdered.

Vol 4
THE HEART'S DESIRE #19-24

One of the convicts, Dexter, has gained access to the armoury, and tries to force Rick and co to leave. However, another zombie attack stalls his plans. In the melee, Rick kills Dexter. The group is joined by mysterious wanderer Michonne. Their dynamic changes when she takes Tyreese as her lover, pushing aside Carol, his previous girlfriend, who attempts suicide. Rick and Tyreese come to blows.

Vol 5
THE BEST DEFENSE #25-30

Lori is facing the prospect of giving birth unaided. When Glenn spots a helicopter, he, Rick, and Michonne follow it to where it's crashed. They reach Woodbury, which is ruled by the psychopathic Governor. He feeds outsiders to zombies, which he uses to spice up fights he organises as entertainment, and keeps his zombie daughter in his flat. Oh, and he has a room full of pickled heads. If all that wasn't bad enough, he chops off Rick's hand and tortures Michonne. Worst of all, he finds out about the prison.

Vol 6
THIS SORROWFUL LIFE #31-36

Aided by some Woodbury residents who don't agree with the Governor's methods, Rick, Glenn and Michonne escape. As the others flee, Michonne takes revenge on the Governor. Back at the prison, more zombies have got in, so the survivors must clear it out again. Afterwards, Rick realises that Martinez, who helped them escape, has headed off back to Woodbury. Fearing betrayal, Rick gives chase in Dale's RV and kills Martinez. On a brighter note, Glenn asks for, and receives, Hershel's approval to propose to Maggie.

Vol 7
THE CALM BEFORE #37-42

The group raid a National Guard depot for weapons and supplies. Back at the prison, Dale is bitten and has his leg amputated, while Lori goes into labour. They're both aided by Alice from Woodbury, who's been training in medicine. Dale survives and Lori gives birth to a baby girl. It's not all good though – Carol kills herself, then eight vehicles, including a tank, appear from Woodbury.

Vol 8
MADE TO SUFFER #43-48

A battle takes place at the prison. After Rick is shot, Dale persuades Andrea and some others to flee in the RV. Michonne and Tyreese go out to scare the Woodbury forces with a counter-attack. Andrea returns to help with the battle, which comes to a head when the Governor drives the tank through the fences, ruining the prison's defences. Things get bad quickly, with many of remaining group being killed. Rick and Carl escape.

Vol 9
HERE WE REMAIN #49-54

Hiding in a house with Carl, Rick becomes delirious. Carl fears he'll have to shoot his dad if he turns. Rick recovers, but his mental health is crumbling. When they set out again, Rick and Carl are reunited with Michonne, before being found by Glenn and Maggie. Another group of survivors appears at the farm, asking for supplies. Its leader, Abraham, convinces Rick's group that the farm isn't safe, so they join forces to head for Washington DC.

Vol 10
WHAT WE BECOME #55-60

Tension between Rick and Abraham comes to a head when Maggie hangs herself, and Abraham wants to shoot her before she turns. Rick's belief that they should try to resuscitate her is vindicated when she turns out to be alive. The two men overcome their differences when they make a run to Cynthiana for supplies from Rick's police station. In Cynthiana, they find Morgan and bring him along. Returning, they're caught in a zombie 'herd'. They escape and make it back to the others.

Vol 11
FEAR THE HUNTERS #61-66

From the original Atlanta group, four children remain, including Ben and Billy. Andrea finds Ben in the woods, sitting beside Billy's body with a bloody knife. Afterwards, the group encounters a wandering priest, Father Gabriel. They hole up in his church, but don't trust him. It turns out another group of survivors, turned cannibal, is planning to pick them off.

Vol 12
LIFE AMONG THEM #67-72

The group pushes on towards Washington, when a clean-cut young man approaches them. He's a scout and recruiter from a walled community, which he invites them to join. The community's leader, Monroe, invites Rick and his group to join them, interviewing them to decide on roles. Rick becomes a constable, donning a uniform once more. He's not comfortable though, partly because the community doesn't allow them to carry weapons. Carl's also unhappy, unable to adapt to a more ordinary life.

At the time of writing, we're up to issue 75, which continues the 'Community' storyline, with Rick becoming increasingly unhinged.

COMIC HEROES

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DEAD MEN WALKING

It was the big hit of Comic-Con; **Joseph McCabe** eats the brains of the stars of *The Walking Dead*'s forthcoming TV adaptation...

Today of all days it's a little ironic that Andrew Lincoln, Sarah Wayne Callies and Jon Bernthal star in a show called *The Walking Dead*, because the three actors should be suffering from terminal exhaustion. Two weeks away from finishing the first season of writer-director Frank Darabont's TV adaptation of Robert Kirkman's comic book saga about apocalyptic survival, the three have flown across the country – from Atlanta, Georgia to San Diego – just to give fans an advance look at the show at Comic-Con International.

In just a few hours they must fly back to Atlanta to resume their work. But if they're feeling spent from the experience, they show little sign of it. Instead, they appear fully charged by the opportunity to engage with fans of the acclaimed horror comic.

GRAPHIC HORROR

"I know that this is a great graphic novel," says Lincoln. As the star of *The Walking Dead*, he plays Kentucky police officer Rick Grimes, a husband and father leading a small band of survivors across a zombie-infested America. "And if I was gonna make something, I would want [it] to have such a fervent, loyal fan base. It's just the world you inhabit. Someone said to me back home in England, 'It's like a modern classical fable, a mythology, a Greek tragedy, this situation. It's like a play.' So the situation makes for such a compelling drama."

Rick's fellow policeman Shane is played by Bernthal, an admitted fan of Max Brooks's zombie novel *World War Z*, and a veteran of films including *The Ghost* and *Night At The Museum: Battle Of The Smithsonian*. He explains to *Comic Heroes* how both he and Lincoln came to be cast.

"I got the script," he begins, "in the beginning of pilot season, when they cast all the new shows – my agents sent me over basically 100 scripts. Everything that was casting then. And when I read this, I sent an email back saying, 'I'd be thrilled just to be an extra in this thing.' I'd never read anything like it before and I had no idea about the comic. The pilot is so good. It's so well written... Then, as the casting went on – strangely enough, they did cast Shane first – I got the opportunity to read with a bunch of different casts. It was amazing, but it just never worked, [even though] there were some great actors. Then Andrew Lincoln came in and he was perfect. I remember, I could see it as soon as he started. I said, 'Oh my God. That's him.' Frank knew it, we all knew. We were so damn relieved."

Callies, a tall, striking brunette who plays Rick's wife Lori in the show, says her casting story was a little different. "I'd actually missed pilot season; I'd written and produced something else. And there was one pilot casting, so my entire pilot season consisted of somebody handing me the script for *The Walking Dead*. I was absolutely certain after my second audition for Frank that I would never get to work on the show. It was one of those moments where I got into my car and closed the door and I was like, 'Don't cry, don't cry, don't cry... [crying] I wanted to do this.' They kept me waiting for eight insane days or something before calling me up and saying, 'Oh, by the way, we knew as soon as you walked in the room.' I was like, 'Thank you. I've got ulcers now.' It was a process," she laughs.

BELOW: We once saw Andrew Lincoln in a Bath nightclub. Fact.

CAST AWAY

The Walking Dead boasts one of the largest ensemble casts in recent genre television. But Callies says that all her castmates are striving to enrich Kirkman and Darabont's vision.

"This is the greatest cast, I gotta tell you. Right now there are 18 principal cast members and there isn't one »

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weak link. Not in the kids, not in the senior citizens (Jeff [DeMunn] is gonna kill me; we have a running joke about that). It's just amazing. We'll be doing these scenes – we're all background at some point in somebody's scene – and you turn around and somebody who has no lines, who's not even written into the scene, is in [the] back, maybe even off camera, having these moments and creating these relationships just for us. It's really great. You just go, 'God, it's beautiful and it's mind-blowing, and that's exactly what we're doing.'"

Lincoln adds that he appreciates the "primal, messy, shambolic" nature of the show.

"What did you say?" asks Callies.

"Shambolic," replies Lincoln.

Bernthal joins in – "Is that a word?"

"I don't understand it," says Callies.

Lincoln feigns frustration. "They're making fun."

"With that accent," laughs Bernthal, "you can say whatever you want and sound smart."

CONVENTIONAL WISDOM

The three actors are joined at Comic-Con by their co-stars Emma Bell, who plays college student Amy, and Laurie Holden, who plays Amy's older sister Andrea. Holden's starred in numerous genre projects, including two Frank Darabont films: *The Majestic* and *The Mist*. We ask her if she sees *The Walking Dead* as a continuation of the latter film's survivalist horror tale.

"An extension?" she says, then pauses for a moment, her icy blue eyes pondering the question. "I guess. This is my third collaboration with Frank. So it's really exciting for me to come and work with people I've worked with before. Greg Nicotero, Jeff DeMunn – there are just so many people on the crew and different actors you'll see. 'Oh, *that* person's from *The Mist*, and *that* person's from *The Mist*!' It's very similar, in terms of the end of the world, human beings and what they do to each other, and an exploration of how sick, twisted and crazy people can get when it comes to surviving. But what's wonderful for me is that, [although] every episode is written by a different writer, Frank puts his stamp on it. He goes in and does a polish. He cares so much, and everything's so rich and textured that it's like *The Shawshank Redemption*. I mean every single script that comes in. It's not like typical TV. It's like, 'Oh my God, this is gorgeous.' We've been so lucky."

Holden admits that she also enjoys the opportunity to kick undead ass on the show. Thanks to her past work, she required no gun training.

"I [don't] need to do that," she says, "because I was in *Silent Hill* and *The Shield* and *The X-Files*. I've worked with a lot of guns and had gun training. So Andrea starts out... She doesn't know she's good at guns when you first meet her. You gotta have somewhere to go. When you first meet her and she's got a gun, she doesn't even know how the safety works. So I've avoided gun training, because if anything I have to work really hard, like, 'Okay, how can this look like I've never held a gun before?' So when I actually do get to use the gun, then I'm gonna just do it for the fun."

ABOVE: Rick Grimes gets serious with a shotgun. And why not?

RIGHT: Our heroes snapped while talking to us at San Diego Comic-Con.

BELOW: Some last-minute zombie make-up adjustments are made while on-set.

"I don't hold guns," laughs Bell. "Guns scare my character." Holden pets her on the shoulder, displaying the same sisterly affection that exists between their characters. The elder actress admits that, after seeing the ways in which some of the other characters dispatch zombies, she's hoping Andrea gets a new weapon.

AXE ME ANYTHING

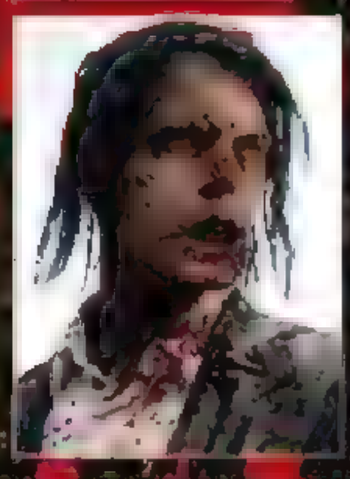
"An axe is kind of cool now. Seeing somebody put an axe through a zombie's head..." She turns to Bell, "Wouldn't you like to do that?"

"No," she says.

"I don't know," muses Holden, with a sly smile. "That might be fun."

When asked why zombies have enjoyed such a strong resurgence in recent years, Bell replies, "I don't know. Maybe it's that perverse fascination human beings have with things they can't explain. You can't explain why something that's dead would be alive again."

"Things are pretty bad in the world," adds Holden, "with the tsunamis and the flooding and the oil spill, with what we're doing to the environment. I don't think it's possible that anybody could come back as a zombie, but we're doing a lot of crazy stuff. Who's to say there couldn't be biological warfare? Who's to say there couldn't be some kind of crazy disease that no one could understand – that there's a part of a [dead person's] brain that works and you can't understand why they're turning into a monster. I don't know, maybe it taps into a great fear."



"WHEN YOU'RE EATING LUNCH, THEY'RE EATING CHICKEN LEGS LIKE THEY WOULD AS ZOMBIES"

"I've always thought," says Bell, "the interesting thing about the comic book and our show – I think they've done a really good job of going into this – is that the characters are great. They have these big arcs, and they're well developed. Even more so on the show, because you have to fill in what's happening from the comic book. And it's almost like the zombies become symbolic of who these people could become. Not just physically eating each other but... When you're a human in an apocalyptic world, you have to make ugly decisions, and the notion of what's right or wrong goes out the window. It's all about survival at that point. Zombies are awful monsters who are just out for themselves, right? Sometimes we have to make decisions that might make us that way, too."

"But not Amy and Andrea," observes Holden.

Bell shakes her head. "No, we're good girls. Very virtuous."

"We don't do anything bad," says Holden. "Yet."

The two actresses agree it's a little disconcerting to be surrounded by animated cadavers every day on set.

FINGER-LICKIN' GOOD

"It's terrifying," says Bell of the show's zombies. "They never break character. Even when they say, 'Cut,' they still walk towards you. You're like, 'It's cut. You can stop!' Even when you're eating lunch, they're eating chicken legs like they would as zombies. I'm not kidding. They're so dedicated."

"I don't really eat lunch anymore," laughs Holden. "People tease me, but it's true. I have liquid lunches, protein shakes, because you lose your appetite when you're around them all the time. We've had a few bigger scenes recently with a lot of zombies. There's been like 20 or 30 zombies on set, and we've had lunches – one half of the room is zombies and the other half is humans. A zombie will come sit down. He'll sit with crew members and everyone will just be... Well, it's gross. Half his face is bitten off, they've got intestines coming out of them..."

"They're awesome though," grins a mischievous Bell.

Before leaving temperate San Diego for the humidity of Atlanta, Bell and Holden remark that, having witnessed the wildly enthusiastic reception *The Walking Dead* received at Comic-Con, they're more excited than ever to get back to work.

"I mean, I knew this before in theory," says Bell, "because everyone was like, 'This is so well liked and it's a well-received comic book and the show has so many fans already.' But it's like, I got to see it with my own two eyes, hear it with my own two ears. We can now go back to the crew, and the rest of the castmates, whom we love, and be like, 'Guys, this is good. We're all part of something really, really great.' That's what it felt like watching that. You never know, it could have gone a million ways. But it's really nice to be in the position that we're in, because we have something that we're actually really proud of."

Holden smiles at her screen sister. "And we like each other. A lot."

TOP: We're going to get the very finest quality zombies in *The Walking Dead*.

ABOVE, RIGHT: Confident but worried. As you would be, understandably.

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The making of Grandville

Grandville **is Bryan Talbot's unique 'anthropomorphic steampunk detective thriller'. Now he's poised to bring us a sequel. By Daniel Etherington**

Grandville. Grand-ville. 'Big-town'. It's the name Bryan Talbot gives to Paris in his new cycle of comics, which began with 2009's sumptuously bound, art nouveau-inflected *Grandville* and is set to continue with the first sequel, *Grandville Mon Amour*. The renaming of the city for these fantastical, action-packed romps is just one of the elements that fell into place quickly for Talbot, who was inspired by 19th century French illustrator Jean Ignace Isidore Gerard, who signed himself 'J.J. Grandville'.

"He was a big influence on [John] Tenniel," explains Talbot, who pored over the work of Tenniel – the man forever associated with illustrating *Alice's Adventures In Wonderland* – during his half-decade labours on *Alice In Sunderland*. "I've had this softback on Grandville for quite a few years". Shortly after I finished *Alice*, I was flicking through it, and it just sort of came to me all at once, the idea for a steampunk detective story. Paris could be called 'Grand-ville' – you know, the biggest city in the world – and [it would be] populated by anthropomorphic animals."

ABOVE: Talbot's artwork is instantly recognisable

LEFT: A remarkable scene – and that elephant certainly looks familiar...

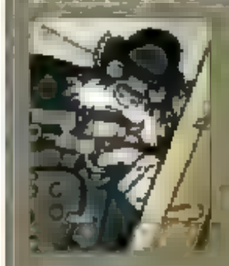
"Usually with graphic novels, all the ones I've done before, I thought about them for years before I actually did anything," he continues. "I'd make notes and do some research, but with *Grandville* I might have thought about it for about a week, then sat down, loosely plotted it and typed it out. Usually, like for *Alice* or *Heart Of Empire* or something, I've done thumbnails for everything, with page by page breakdowns. With *Grandville* I just started typing – page one, scene one. It was really fun writing it."

That's not to say producing such a book, which features a huge array of hand-drawn anthropomorphic characters set on elaborate, digitally coloured backdrops, is a quick process. *Grandville* ended up taking about a year to illustrate and this year's sequel, *Grandville Mon Amour*, is a similar 12-month endeavour. "*Grandville* was the first comic that I actually coloured

"GRANDVILLE WAS THE FIRST COMIC THAT I ACTUALLY COLOURED ALL ON COMPUTER"

WHO'S WHO IN GRANDVILLE

Archie LeBrock



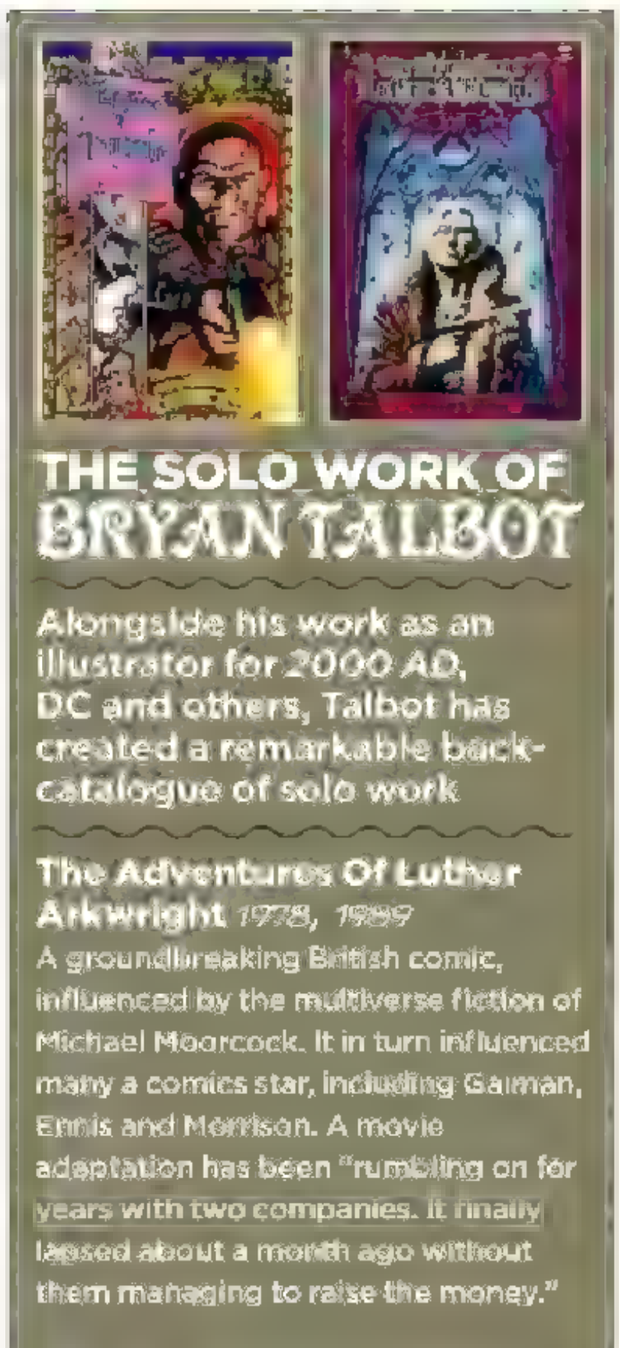
The star of the books, a Scotland Yard detective inspector. Like Sherlock Holmes by way of "a brick shit house." Talbot says: "My first instinct was to make him a rat, but just in the week that followed, thinking about it, I thought he ought to be quite a ferocious character, and badgers are. So the rat became his sidekick."

Roderick Ratzi

The aforementioned sidekick, or adjunct. Half the size of LeBrock, debonair – nay, spiffy – with boater, bow tie, monocle and a cane that doubles as a gun. "He's a lot of fun to do – a character who talks like Bertie Wooster or Lord Peter Wimsey."

Edward 'Mad Dog' Mastock

The main antagonist in *Grandville Mon Amour*, a ferocious serial killer who escapes execution, prompting a manhunt. "He was a freedom fighter or a terrorist," says Talbot. "You get a glimpse of some of the lives he's destroyed through his earlier activity."



Alongside his work as an illustrator for *2000 AD*, DC and others, Talbot has created a remarkable back-catalogue of solo work

The Adventures Of Luther Arkwright *1978, 1989*
A groundbreaking British comic, influenced by the multiverse fiction of Michael Moorcock. It in turn influenced many a comics star, including Gaiman, Ennis and Morrison. A movie adaptation has been "rumbling on for years with two companies. It finally lapsed about a month ago without them managing to raise the money."

The Tale Of One Bad Rat *1994–1995*
With elegant watercolour artwork and references to Beatrix Potter, this book deals eloquently with the subject of childhood sexual abuse. It was also mooted for live-action adaptation. "David Richardson [of *Shameless*] wanted to make it. It was actually BBC children's programmes, but they decided against it because they thought it was a bit too adult. I think it's changed to BBC Three, but I don't know if anything will come of it."

Heart Of Empire *1999*
The sequel to *The Adventures Of Luther Arkwright*, featuring Luther's daughter Victoria. While not as experimental as its forebear, it's still packed with details and symbols from history, myth and politics.

Alice In Sunderland *2007*
Arguably the most innovative work in the comics medium in years, this is an extraordinary documentary/history lesson/comic book survey of Lewis Carroll's relationship with the north-east of England. Replete with Sid James's ghost.

Metronome *2008*
Published as the work of French-Japanese artist Veronique Tanaka. Talbot revealed he was the creator in 2009. The text-free comic "was all done on computer. I just wanted to do that as a quick, stylistic experiment."

Of course, we have the *usual perverts* here, all trying to claim responsibility for the crimes...
"Pig" Mallion, "Toilet" Duck, "Poo" Bear and the worst one...

all on computer," says Talbot. "I did it two pages by two pages. I always work on two pages together, they're facing each other, so they have to work together. So with the first one, I drew two pages, inked two pages, then coloured two pages. With this one [*Mon Amour*], I penciled the entire thing, inked it all, and now I'm going through colouring it all. It's the way I used to work – the way I did *Bad Rat* and *Heart Of Empire*. I prefer that way because it means by the time you reach the end and go back, you see mistakes and they're easier to change."

Compared to the dense, weaving narratives of *Alice In Sunderland*, the *Grandville* books are more like break-neck thrillers. Not that *Grandville* was lacking in depth, though. Despite the combination of animals and action, it was full of allusions to real-world politics. During *Grandville*, political schemers in the upper echelons of French Imperial society are demonising Britain, trying to start a war – and hoping to seize its North Sea oil reserves. Talbot's pretty frank about all this: "There are parallels with the lies about weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, the 'super bomb'."

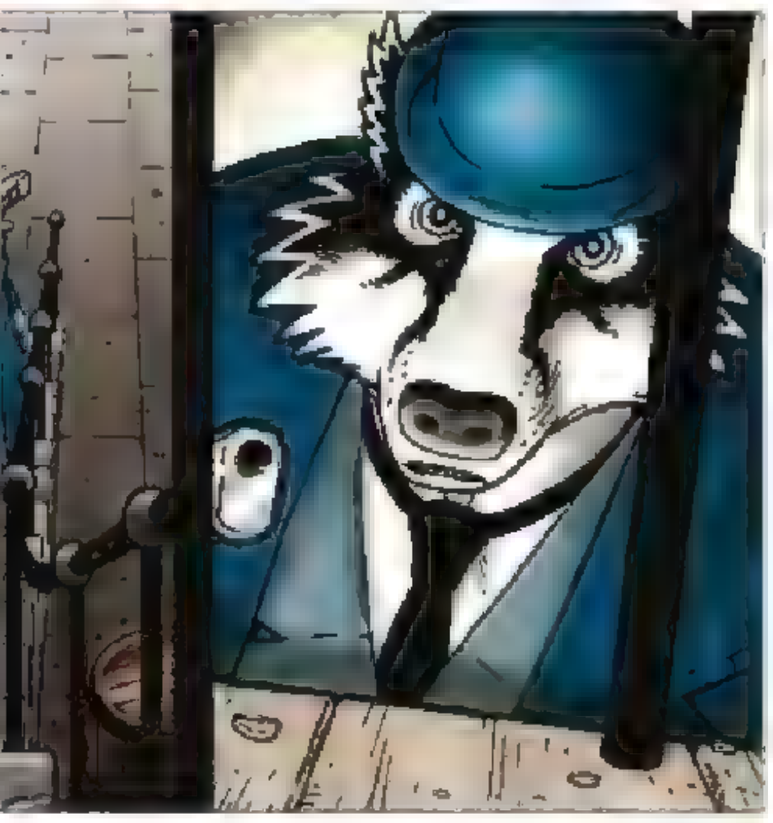
Grandville Mon Amour, which picks up a month after *Grandville*'s conclusion, continues to explore this messy political situation. The main thrust of its story involves a manhunt for one 'Mad Dog' Mastock. "He's a really dangerous character," explains Talbot. "Ex-urban guerrilla, a member

TOP: Another anthropomorphic reference here

RIGHT: Detective Inspector LeBrock closes in on his quarry

of the Resistance when they were still occupied by France. He really took pleasure in his work, you know. Killed lots of people, bit of a maniac. But LeBrock put him away. One of the themes is the morality of terrorism. But like the first one, first and foremost it's an enjoyable action-adventure romp. That's the idea with these things – they're fun. You know I said the first

"THERE ARE PARALLELS WITH THE LIES ABOUT WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION IN IRAQ, THE 'SUPER BOMB'"



one was a bit Tarantino-esque? Well, this is more sort of Hitchcock."

Grandville may yet prove to be Talbot's most epic undertaking. "I've got ideas for at least another three good stories," he says. So we may be getting new jaunts to this furry French empire for a while yet. Talbot, however, is pragmatic. "The best thing to do is see how these first two go. They seem to be going well: the first one's out in eight countries." Talbot hints that he may even explain more about the origins of the various species seen in the books: "I don't want to give it away, but you'll see in some of the future ones if I ever get round to them." In the meantime, *Grandville Mon Amour* should be with us in November.

GRANDVILLE STEP-BY-STEP

Bryan Talbot himself takes us through the creation of a panel from *Grandville Mon Amour*...

1 Pencils

The pencils for panel one, page 42, done traditionally on a drawing board. You can see where I've allowed space for text, estimating the size of the speech balloons and placing them so that the order in which they're to be read is obvious.

2 Inking

Next, the pencils are inked using a mixture of pens and brushes. After inking, the pencil lines are erased and the artwork scanned into the computer. The inks are cleaned up and any smudges or mistakes corrected. Traditionally this was done using white gouache paint. This is the point where I add the balloons, using my own font. The lettering layer stays on top of the others.

3 Colouring

Next come the colour flats: the different areas of the illustration that are selected and filled with different solid colours on a layer beneath the linework. Just over half the colour flats in *Grandville Mon Amour* were done by Jesse Kindzierski, daughter of the famous US comic colourist Lovern Kindzierski. The rest by my mate, the designer Jordan Smith. Having someone else do the flats saves time and enables me to start on the rendering.

4 Adjustment

I can then select each area easily by using the Magic Wand tool, change or adjust the colours and render them in a way that's very similar to painting, mainly using the Dodge and Burn tools and the Airbrush to create the light, shade and texture.

5 Finished!

And here's the finished panel. The smoke and light effects are 'painted' in white on different layers over the black line layer. Finally I've added a green colour layer at 18 per cent opacity to this and the rest of the panels in this sequence to add atmosphere to the chapter.

THE STORYTELLER

Think superheroes have had it? Legendary writer **Grant Morrison** challenges us all to think again – and explains exactly why Alan Moore is wrong... by **Stephen Jewell**

Just as Alan Moore revolutionised comic books in the early '80s with his realistic reinvention of *Swamp Thing*, Grant Morrison has turned the medium on its head with his fourth wall-busting take on *Animal Man* and the Dada-esque mayhem of *Doom Patrol*.

But unlike the *Watchmen* creator, who swore off mainstream comics long ago, the Glaswegian has retained his childhood affection for Marvel and DC's iconic superheroes. Batman has always held a special place in his heart, as he was recently reminded when his mother gave him some of his old school jotters – which were full of the then-seven-year-old Morrison's drawings of the Caped Crusader.

"I'm 50 years old and I'm still doing bloody Batman," he recalls with a laugh. "It was a strange realisation when I looked back at those pictures, because it was exactly the same character that I'm writing about today. My course seems to have been set very early. I've been into Batman since I was a kid through the TV show and the comics. When I was a fan in the '70s, I loved Neal Adams and Denny O'Neill's stuff and Steve Englehart and Marshall Rogers's run and Frank Miller. I've always been a Batman fan."

Morrison first delved into the crazy world of Batman in 1989 when he collaborated with Dave McKean on the bestselling graphic novel *Arkham Asylum*. In 1997 he restored the character, along with other DC big hitters Superman and Wonder Woman, to the ranks of the rejuvenated *Justice League Of America*.

He defected to Marvel in 2001, where he and frequent artistic partner Frank Quitely breathed new life into the then-floundering *X-Men*. Since switching back to DC in 2003, he has orchestrated the Dark Knight's apparent death in *Batman R.I.P.* before revealing that he was actually stranded at the dawn of time in the multiverse-spanning crossover *Final Crisis*. Most recently, he has charted the amnesiac Bat's journey back through the centuries to the contemporary DC Universe in *Batman: The Return Of Bruce Wayne*.

"I wanted to do a real epic," he declares. "A lot of the elements I've been drawing on are the parts of Batman's publishing history that have been overlooked, like the sci-fi stuff, the creepy horror stories and the weirder aspects of the character. The time travel story takes Batman as far as he can go in that direction. The new direction is a little more down-to-earth in some ways, but I wanted to bring it to a death-psychedelic peak first, to see how far you can take Batman in that direction before his back breaks! *Return* is about Batman the myth, the essence of Batman. When he actually gets back, it's more about the man."

LEFT: Mr Grant Morrison himself, photo courtesy of Allan Amato

NEVER-ENDING STORY

The conclusion of the six-issue series resolves numerous subplots that Morrison has carefully planted over the past seven years. "The way it works is that everything I've done since I came back to DC is all tied together," he says. "The end of the *Batman* run ties directly into some stuff that I did when I took over writing the book in 2006. I've tried to connect it all together, so hopefully it will all tie up as one big story which says everything I have to say about the character."

He has his work cut out for him, keeping his intricate plots in line with what DC's other leading scribes such as Geoff Johns are doing in their respective books. "When you're working in the DC Universe, it's very different to doing your own work," admits Morrison. "I've always said that it's an actual place that has depth to it and has its own topography. »

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DC Comics goes back 70 years, with writers and artists adding to this endless recurring story. The characters never grow old and they never die. I might go in there thinking that I'm going to finish a story, but it's the nature of these never-ending, never-ageing characters that there's always a 'to be continued'."

Morrison is fascinated by the concept of continuity. "It's something that is changed, erased and recreated all the time, but it always anchors itself around imperishable concepts," he says. "I'm really interested in the idea of the comic book universe and the fact that it has its own rules and 'history'. The scenery and the characters can change, but everything essentially stays the same. Bob Kane was a 17-year-old when he created Bruce Wayne, but he grew old and died while Bruce Wayne is still 30-something ÷ I love that aspect of it. And the landmarks stay consistent. You can't do a *Batman* story without the Batmobile or Wayne Manor; they'll always be there in some form. People who go and interact with those 2D universes are forced to deal with those conditions. The rules of the continuum will always have more power than the visiting artist."

As chronicled in the delightfully ultra-violent *Batman And Robin*, a new Dark Knight and Boy Wonder, AKA erstwhile Nightwing Dick Grayson and Bruce Wayne and Talia Al Ghul's son Damian, have patrolled the Gotham streets in Bruce Wayne's absence. "It's hard work but it's been a lot of fun having control of all of the books at the same time," says Morrison. "For a change, I'm pleased with it. I usually find some little error or screw-up, but this time I'm actually happy at just how well everything has meshed together and the way that it's all plunging towards its conclusion."

LEFT: *The Return Of Bruce Wayne*. Were cavemen scared of bats? And criminals?

ABOVE: New Batman Dick Grayson and Damian Wayne, the new Robin

BELOW: Frank Quitely's re-styled Batmobile chases the Toad. Croak!

(S) Images © DC Comics

BACK FROM THE DEAD

Morrison is resurrecting Bruce Wayne sooner than he might have preferred. "Back when we first came up with the idea, Paul Levitz was concerned that people might believe we'd got rid of Bruce Wayne for good and he wasn't entirely convinced he could assure his own bosses that Dick Grayson was capable of helming the flagship *Batman* franchise on his own," he says, referring to DC's former president. "*Batman And Robin* was seen more as a stunt that might run for six months, while I imagined it going on for two years at least. But we came to a compromise to do a year of *Batman And Robin*, which extended to 16 issues for me. If it been had left up to me, I'd have kept those guys as Batman and Robin for years and not told anybody where Bruce was, but it all worked out fine, as everybody really liked Dick Grayson and Damian as Batman and Robin."

After *The Return of Bruce Wayne*, Morrison intends to continue writing *Batman* for another two years as "a lot of strands have now come to a head, but there's another thread left from earlier stories that's going to become the basis for the next big arc."

With November's *Batman And Robin #17*, Pete Tomasi will replace

WHEN YOU LAUGH-WHEN YOU CRY!
HERE COMES MICKEY BYE!
HI, GRIM!
HOW ABOUT A GAME FOR OLD TIMES' SAKE?
I'LL PUT UP A FEW PALLS!
Y' Y' Y' GET ME OUTTA HERE!

I'M SAD GIVES ME THE CREEPY-CRAWLIES
WE'VE PLAYED BEFORE, GONDOLIER
YOU NEVER WIN AND I'M BORED
I'M NOT SCARED OF YOU.
WELL, MAYBE YOU SHOULD BE, SMART MOUTH
I'LL BET YOU ONE DIE JUST LIKE I GOT YOUR PAL, CHUBBY DA CHOCMA!
OR SHOULD I SAY MY WIFE
SURE
IF HE'S YOUR PAL WHERE IS HE?
OH, CHUBBY'S ALWAYS AROUND SOME-WHERE...
...MATTER OF FACT, GEMBUL HE'S BEHIND YOU RIGHT NOW.
THINK I'LL FALL FOR THAT ONE?
WHY IS DEATH PLAYING CHESS HERE ON THE STREET CORNER ANYWAY?
SHOULDN'T YOU BE WAY MORE IMPORTANT?

him as he moves over to the new Yanick Paquette-pencilled *Batman Inc*, allowing him to "drive the story forward in a way that's faster, twistier and a bit more exciting."

Described as more of a team book, Morrison compares *Batman Inc* not only to the classic '70s team-up title *The Brave And The Bold*, but also to the current Cartoon Network animated series of the same name. "Bob Haney and Jim Aparo's inventive and iconoclastic run on the book is one of my big influences," he says. "But I also like the structure of the animated show and the accompanying *Johnny DC* comic book."

Also getting their own series are Knight and Squire, who will debut next month in their first six-issue mini by Brits Paul Cornell and Jimmy Broxton. Having first appeared in *Batman* in 1950, the British dynamic duo were revived by Morrison in *JLA Classified* in 2004 before cropping up in *Batman* as members of the International Club of Heroes in the JH Williams-illustrated murder mystery 'The Island Of Mister Mayhew' (*Batman* #667-669).

"I'M REALLY INTERESTED IN THE IDEA OF THE COMIC BOOK UNIVERSE AND THE FACT THAT IT HAS ITS OWN RULES AND ETERNALLY-RECURRING 'HISTORY'"

ABOVE: The weird and wonderful *Seaguy*, which is all about the hero's journey.

RIGHT: An older, wiser Seaguy stands up to the Grim Reaper.

"Hopefully when it comes out, it'll be like *The Avengers* meets *Shameless*," laughs Morrison, referring to John Steed and Emma Peel rather than Marvel's supergroup. "I've been working on those characters for about ten years, building them up in the background of other stories that I've been doing. I came up with the idea of the original Squire becoming the Knight after his father was killed. The idea was, 'what would have happened to a Batman who has just lost it?' The Knight blows his money on drink and drugs and then gets rescued by a young working-class girl and her mum, who nurse him back to health. He becomes a superhero again and the girl, Beryl Hutchinson, becomes the new Squire. I liked the idea of an aristocratic superhero operating from a council house, but Paul has some mad ideas of his own, so I'm looking forward to what he comes up with."

Morrison has nearly completed the scripts for next summer's even more ambitious *Multiversity*, an eight-part series that explores DC's alternate realities. "I wanted to finish them all before sending them out, to make sure that everything was nailed down," says Morrison, who has long admired DC's multiverses, which re-emerged in 2005 crossover *Infinite Crisis* after being dropped two decades earlier in *Crisis On Infinite Earths*.

PARALLEL WORLDS

"They threw all that stuff out," he declares. "They said they did it because nobody could understand multiple parallel universes vibrating in the same space on different frequencies. But everybody understood it; I understood it when I was a ten-year-old kid, so I don't know what they were thinking. Maybe some of the older readers couldn't understand it, but for me it's always been one of the most exciting aspects of the DC Universe."

Each double-sized issue of *Multiversity* will be illustrated by a different artist, including *Seaguy*'s

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Cameron Stewart, who takes on Captain Marvel's universe in 'Thunderworld'. "The story's called 'Captain Marvel And The Day That Never Was!' and it's my definitive take on the Marvel Family," says Morrison. "And I offered 'Ultraa', which is set on our own real world Earth-Prime, to Frazer Irving at San Diego. It is, I believe, the world's first 'haunted' comic book. You'll see what I mean when it comes out. They're all quite different books."

PRIMAL APPEAL

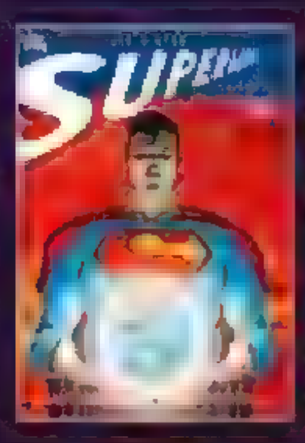
Most intriguingly, he will reunite with Frank Quitely for 'Pax Americana', which concentrates on the former Charlton characters that provided the original basis for *Watchmen*. "We thought it would be appropriate to re-think and update the kind of in-your-face self-reflecting narrative techniques used by Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons and to apply them to a whole new story, which asks 'what if *Watchmen* had been conceived now, in the contemporary political landscape, and with the Charlton characters themselves, rather than analogues?'" reveals Morrison. "So the cover has a close-up on a burning peace flag and a Delmore Schwartz quote – 'Time is the school in which we learn, time is the fire in which we burn' – and it all blossoms from there."

Moore informed *Comic Heroes* last issue that he was retiring from writing comic books, as he believes that the industry is "creatively bankrupt." He criticised Marvel and DC for constantly rebooting and bringing characters back from the dead. However, Morrison stresses that superhero tales are designed to do exactly that.

"In my view, the reason they're 'recycled' is simple; these are primal stories that appeal to human beings in every culture, at any time," he reasons. "They're designed to be told over and over again. If you were an Aboriginal kid or a tribal shaman, that's what you'd do; you'd participate in the recycling of stories, the 'revamping'

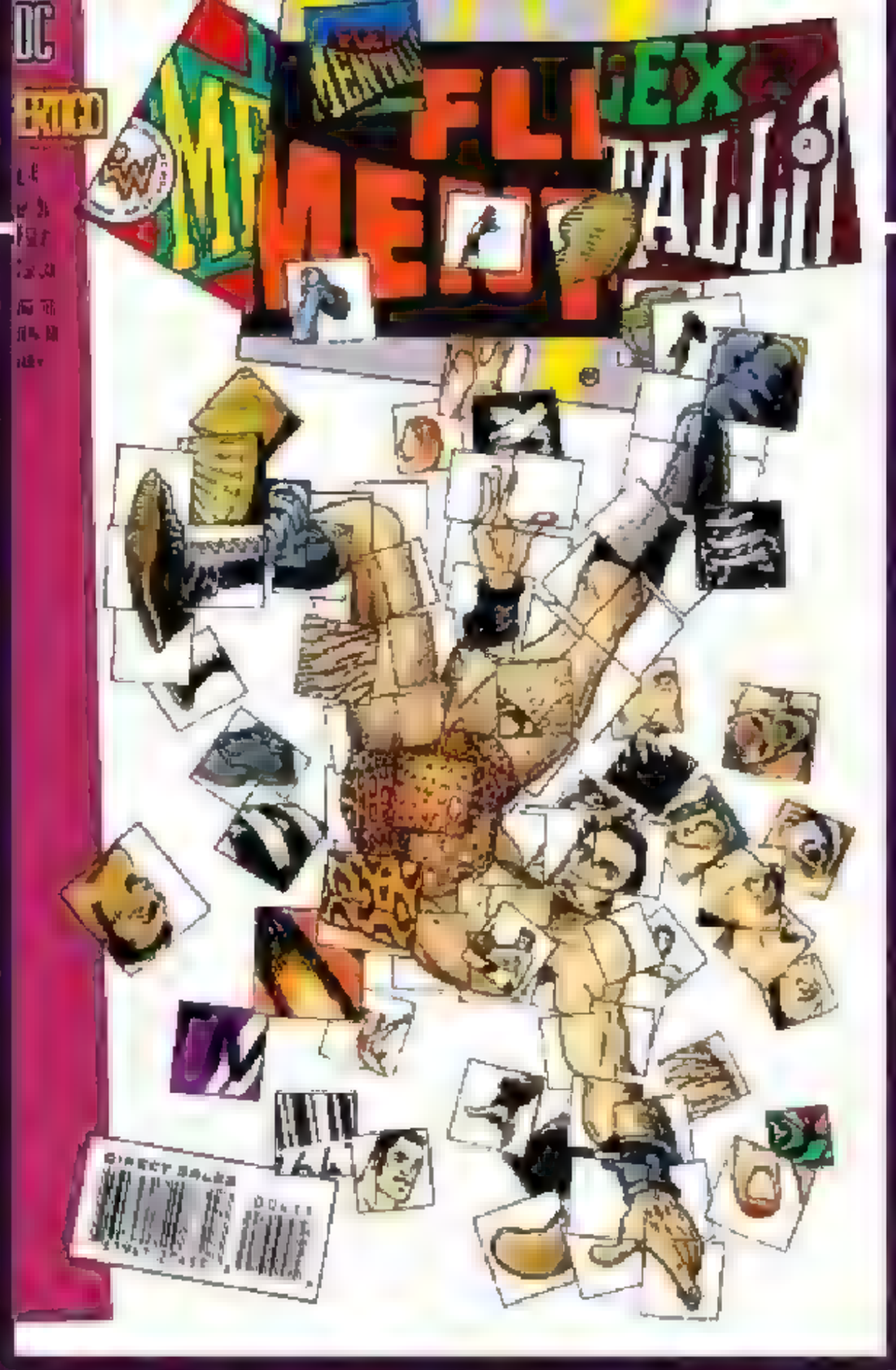
LEFT: *All Star Superman* remains one of the very finest runs of superhero comics. Like, *ever*.

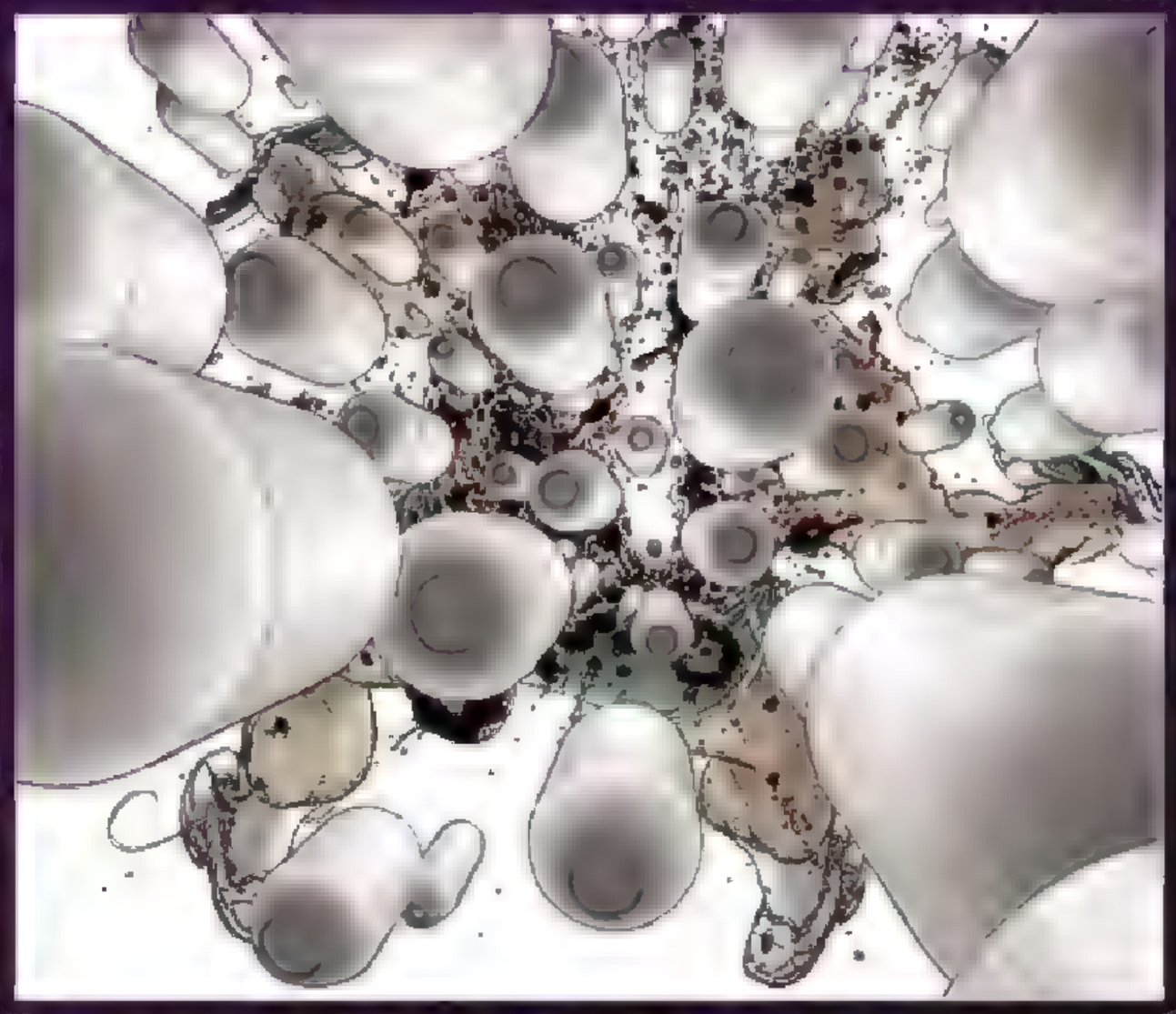
RIGHT: If that isn't a quintessential *Superman* moment, we don't know what is. Sniff.



of characters and scenarios, the explaining away of plot-holes. Some do the job with more skill and attention to detail than others, but if you work with Marvel, DC or other companies' pulp fiction characters, you're basically re-painting pictures of the ancestors on the cave walls."

According to Morrison, the likes of Captain America and Superman are mythical creatures. "They have origins and they have deaths but superheroes live in a permanent middle world between the two," he says. "They serve a universal function as simple hieroglyphic representations of particular persistent or eternal human feelings. DC and Marvel superhero stories exist in the Dreamtime of their continuity. Alan Moore has specialised in elegant depictions of storybook characters growing old or disillusioned and having lots of sex with one another, but to insist that Batman or Spider-Man should be subject to the same rules of change that apply to living, breathing people without





"THERE HAVE BEEN PEOPLE WEARING COSTUMES IN THAT KICK-ASS KIND OF WAY FOR YEARS, SINCE BEFORE EVEN THE COMIC CAME OUT"

acknowledging the obvious reasons why they are not seems a wilful misunderstanding of the basic nature of this material."

Morrison challenges Moore's assertion that there has been nothing decent published in mainstream comics since *Watchmen* first appeared in 1986. "I can think of numerous innovative and generally superlative superhero comics that have been published since then, never mind all of the great sci-fi, horror and non-genre books," he says. "Most of them owe nothing to the style, themes or so-called 'bad mood' that drove *Watchmen*. Peter Milligan and Duncan Fegredo's *Enigma*, for instance, is a story about a Dr Manhattan-level superhuman in the 'real world' which is sexy and playful and operates on every level at several notches of sophistication and maturity above *Watchmen*. I'd say the same about *Rogan Gosh* by Milligan and Brendan McCarthy. *Sandman* surely has some merit. I'll throw in my own *Flex Mentallo* or *All Star Superman* as two examples of intelligent, non-*Watchmen*-influenced superhero stories."

Morrison is reading his old comics again as research for *Supergods*, a history of superheroes that will be published by Random House next year. "I've discovered some amazing things that I didn't know," he says. "I originally dismissed the early *Superman* stuff as being quite crude, but when you look at the very first story by Siegel and Shuster again, it's incredible in the way that it breaks open this new form and introduces the idea of the superhero into comics, which didn't really have any specific content to call their own at the time. The colour, the rapid edits and the breakneck decompressed narrative velocity were revolutionary and are still thrilling. Reading this in 1938 must have felt like being shot from a gun."

TOP RIGHT: Stunning art from *We3* by Frank Quitely. Bang!

ABOVE: The three-issue *We3* is tight, beautiful and very moving indeed.

FUTURE HEROES

Supergods is subtitled 'Our World In The Age Of The Superhero'. So where does Morrison see the genre going in the 21st century? "Onto the cinema screen first, and then into real life," he suggests. "There have been people wearing costumes in that *Kick-Ass* kind of way for years, since before even the comic came out. Everybody wants to be a star. Everyone is a superhero, like in *Seaguy*. The next place to go is medical advances and bionics, where you start to get actual super-people. Superheroes are one of the few ideas about the future that we've got left in a world obsessed with catastrophic climate change and the imminent, well-deserved end of us all. We don't have a Space Race any more to get us off the planet, so superheroes are this one last positive utopian hope of where we might go to escape the no-future scenario. These fictions offer a last chance that we could improve ourselves, turn into own our heroes and, with a single bound, soar high enough to see a way out of our alleged predicament."

Long out of print, Morrison's *Zenith* could soon be collected again after Rebellion graphic novel editor Keith Richardson announced that a definitive one-volume collection of the *2000 AD* series was in the works, proclaiming it to be "our *Marvelman*". However, the last edition was pulped after a dispute over copyright.

"When you read *Zenith* now, its still quite contemporary," says Morrison. "It's written in a style that's not too different from a current-day Marvel

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ACIIEEEEEED!

OH NO.

DELL

book. It would be nice to see it out there again, certainly."

Closer to seeing the light of day is *18 Days*, Morrison's sci-fi reimagining of the Indian legend the Mahabharata. Originally conceived as a series of animated webisodes, it was placed on hold after the demise of publisher Virgin Comics. It has since morphed into Liquid Comics, which, in conjunction with Dynamite, is producing a lavish illustrated tome of Morrison's notes and scripts and Mukesh Singh's lavish art.

"It's like one of those old '70s Roger Dean books with all these amazing double-page illustrations showing thousands of men and dinosaurs fighting on battlefields," says Morrison. "It was a pity the animated series didn't come together, because I got really involved with it – but at least I got the chance to see my stuff visualised by the truly brilliant Mukesh Singh. I'm sure something will happen with this: it's too good to languish. I'd like to see it done as a multi-cultural *The Lord Of The Rings*-style trilogy with a visionary director like Tarsem Singh or Guillermo Del Toro, and now that the book's coming out, we can hand it out to producers."

"ZENITH IS WRITTEN IN A STYLE THAT'S NOT TOO DIFFERENT FROM A CURRENT-DAY MARVEL BOOK. IT WOULD BE NICE TO SEE IT OUT THERE AGAIN, CERTAINLY"

LEFT: 80s comic star Archie the Robot turned up in *Zenith* as an Acid casualty.

RIGHT: Modern-day superhero *Zenith* – soon to be finally reprinted? Fingers crossed.

(3) Images © Rebellion

TRUE LOVE

Along with Robert E Howard and Michael Moorcock, JRR Tolkien was one of the touchstones for *Joe The Barbarian*, which centres around a diabetic teenager who is proclaimed the savior of a mythical realm. Drawn by Sean Murphy, the soon-to-be-concluded eight-issue Vertigo series appears to have fallen through the cracks, although news that *Clash Of The Titans* producer Thunder Road is developing it for a film should bring some much-needed attention. "I've wanted to do that story for years," says Morrison. "It's weird but it's almost been invisible. Sales are fine and reviews are all great, but there's been very little online talk about the story. I expect people will pay more attention when it comes out as a collection next year, which was how it was meant to be read – as a complete story. Sean Murphy has done some incredible work."

Morrison has also several big and small-screen projects of his own in the pipeline. For the BBC, he's scripting *Bonnyroad*, which is being produced by Stephen Fry's company Sprout and directed by *Sherlock*'s Paul McGuigan. He is also working with music video director Adam Egypt Mortimer on independent feature *Sinatoro*, which he describes as "a psychedelic crime horror sci-fi thriller romance that will change how you think and feel about life and death."

However, comics will always remain Morrison's first love. "I enjoy doing film and TV because learning the tricks they use and understanding why they do it the way they do helps make me better as a writer," he says. "Writing a film or a TV show is quite a specific formula, like learning to write sonnets or haiku, so it's fun to pick up those skills. That's been interesting, but you can do a whole lot more in comics. I like comics best because they offer the chance to play a little differently with narrative; the words or images coming out of somebody's head don't have to conform to Hollywood three-act structures or justify a $200 million budget, which means more opportunity for the writer or artist to get down on the page exactly what's in his or her head. That freedom is rare in commercial writing."

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HISTORY OF THE MARVEL UNIVERSE: PART ONE

THE AVENGERS

Christopher Brosnahan takes a deep breath and details the Marvel Universe through the prism of its mightiest heroes. First up, it's the Avengers, while next issue he'll be tackling the X-Men...

DC and Marvel do things rather differently. DC Comics tends to have large crossovers that bring in pretty much every character from the company in huge, multiverse-spanning tales. It also continually references stories going back as far as *Crisis On Infinite Earths*. Marvel, on the other hand, tends to move straight from one event to another, rarely looking back as it does so. Generally speaking, you only need to understand the last five years or so to comprehend what's going on in a Marvel event. It's not necessarily that Marvel does things better or worse – it could be argued that DC Comics tends to concentrate on deeper, more historical stories.

While this isn't a hard and fast rule, Marvel tends to keep its heavy-hitters somewhat separate. Generally, big Marvel events are either *Avengers* or *X-Men* stories. There'll usually be some tying-in from one to the other, but to keep things as simple as possible, we're going to concentrate on the Avengers in this issue, and next time we'll focus on the X-Men.

Although Marvel Comics itself only came into existence in 1961, the company had been around for a long time before that. Starting life as Timely Comics in 1939, its flagship title was *Marvel Comics*. This eventually became the name of the company, as *Detective Comics* did for what Marvel refers to as the 'Distinguished Competition'.

As Timely, the company oversaw the creation of long-lasting characters, such as the Human Torch (the original, rather than the *Fantastic Four* version), Ka-Zar, the Sub-Mariner and Captain America. These characters were popular and their comic books sold well, but there was no long-term plan for them.

In the 1950s, Timely became Atlas Comics. Superheroics had gone out of fashion and Atlas concentrated on different genres, including a successful horror franchise, as well as a number of romance-themed comics. There were attempts to resurrect superhero comics, but they didn't really take off in the same way.

Meanwhile, over at DC, the Silver Age was just starting. This led to a more science fiction based ethos for Atlas, and it renamed itself to the more reflective Marvel Comics. *Amazing Adventures* and *Amazing Fantasy* were two of its main titles, and were soon joined by the first team in the modern Marvel era – the Fantastic Four.

The Fantastic Four were somewhere between space explorers and superheroes, and were immediately popular. Stan Lee managed to convince the publishers to allow him to run a new character called Spider-Man in *Amazing Fantasy*, who also quickly became a hit. The Marvel era had now truly begun.

THE CLASSIC AVENGERS

The names Stan Lee and Jack Kirby are synonymous with Marvel Comics, but sometimes it's worth taking a look back at the characters that the two either directly created, or at least had a hand in. Captain America, Spider-Man, Thor, Iron Man, the Hulk, the X-Men, Daredevil, Doctor Strange, the Silver Surfer, Doctor Doom, Magneto, the Black Panther... The list goes on and on, and is filled with classic characters that have stood the test of time. Obviously, there were other people involved with a lot of them, but the fact remains that Stan Lee and Jack Kirby were the biggest names around when they created the Avengers in 1964.

When Marvel Comics needed to bring out a comic to rival DC Comics' *Justice League Of America*, who else were they going to turn to? The term 'superstar creators' wasn't really used at the time, but it couldn't have been more appropriate. So, the Lee/Kirby characters were joined in a team book.

Since the beginning, one of the unique selling points of *The Avengers* has been the revolving cast list. In fact, the roster of members changed even between issues one and two. In the first issue, Iron Man, Thor, the Hulk, Ant Man and the Wasp joined forces to battle Thor's brother Loki, then decided to name themselves the Avengers, primarily because, well, it sounded cool. In the very next issue, though, the »

"STAN LEE AND JACK KIRBY WERE THE BIGGEST NAMES AROUND WHEN THEY CREATED THE AVENGERS IN 1964"

HANK PYM

When it comes to superheroes, Hank is a difficult one to write well, despite his age and pedigree. In fact, he turned up in the Marvel Universe just after the Fantastic Four – he should be Marvel royalty. You've almost got to feel bad for him, because in the Marvel Universe, he's dangerously incompetent.

First of all, you've got the fact that he's been unable to pick an identity and stick with it. He's been Ant Man, Giant Man, Goliath, Yellowjacket and he's now the Wasp. If you throw in the fact that while he was going through a nervous breakdown after being suspended for getting too violent as an Avenger, he faked a supervillain attack on the team and then hit his wife, it goes a more than a little beyond just 'being a junior member of the team'.

All this happened after he created Ultron (a cyber nutcase who became one of the Avengers' most formidable foes), but before he was rightly jailed for attempting to steal the national reserves of adamantium (a hugely precious metal in the Marvel Universe). You get the feeling that, at superhero parties, he's the guy everyone hopes not to catch the eye of in case he comes over and talks to them.

While there are rumours of Nathan Fillion being cast in the role for the *Avengers* movie, we're beginning to think that Norman Wisdom may be better casting. Or Frank Spencer. Or perhaps Homer Simpson.

ABOVE: Some Avengers, assembled. With lovely art by John *Planetary* Cassaday

villain Space Phantom impersonated the Hulk, leading to the Green Goliath seeing how little the rest of the team trusted him and choosing to leave.

By issue four, Captain America had been found frozen in ice, thawed out and joined the team. Since then, he's generally been referred to as a founding member. In fact, most iterations of the group have featured Captain America, Iron Man and Thor.

TEAM SPIRIT

This also highlights one of the other major selling points of *The Avengers*: not everybody on the team gets on. In fact, they're mostly stubborn and argumentative. While this is pretty much par for the course these days back in the '60s it was something very new and fresh. Also, there was the general idea that the Avengers had a strong public profile in the Marvel Universe – this was generally slightly unusual, because Stan Lee tended to like his characters to be misunderstood.

The revolving membership led to a different style fairly quickly, when Hawkeye, the Scarlet Witch and Quicksilver joined Captain America in the team. The 'kooky quartet', as they were known, led to longevity for all the characters, most notably Hawkeye, who has been a team regular ever since. Brother and sister Quicksilver and Scarlet Witch even turned out to be the children of uber-baddie Magneto. This was the first suggestion of how varied the title would end up being. Although the characters mentioned so far have been the most regular active members, there have been almost 90 Avengers (including honorary and unofficial members).

The team ended up being based in New York (as most Marvel characters are, because it leads to having a reason to bump into Spider-Man or the Fantastic Four or the Punisher), in a Tony Stark-provided mansion, serviced by another long-running character, Jarvis the butler. Rather sardonic as well as loyal, Jarvis may not have the recognition factor of Batman's butler Alfred, but he's a fun character in his own right (especially in recent years, when he and Peter Parker's aunt May have flirted with each other).

There was an attempt to diversify further with the introduction of *The West Coast Avengers* – a version set on the other side of the country. This title was fairly strong, but didn't really take off in the same way as the original series and didn't last too long as a result. At least it fared better than classic misfire *The Defenders*, which tends to be treated as a punchline among fans and writers.

If *The Avengers* has a problem, it's that it's tended to lack direction. Unlike the X-Men, whose team is based around the idea of self-preservation as a species, there was never an

"BY ISSUE FOUR, CAPTAIN AMERICA HAD BEEN FOUND FROZEN IN ICE, THAWED OUT AND JOINED THE TEAM"

All images © Marvel Entertainment

overriding reason for the Avengers to exist. Also, for a long time Marvel frowned upon the team being made up of heavy-hitters (unlike DC with *Justice League Of America*). The benefit of this was that a large number of characters got exposure that may otherwise have been difficult to achieve. The major negative was that the team was often comprised of B-, C- and even D-list characters. While Marvel built its universe around its main characters, there were times when the Avengers were, well .. just *there*.

VENGEANCE AND JUSTICE

The team certainly flourished at times, though – usually when it was centred more around the larger characters. As so, some writers and artists are remembered more fondly than others. The work of Kurt Busiek and George Perez is particularly well regarded, especially their long-awaited crossover with *Justice League Of America* (a series that took almost 20 years to come to fruition).

Somewhat less celebrated is the 'Heroes Reborn' version of the team. Following their deaths in the *X-Men* 'Onslaught' storyline, the Avengers were recreated in an alternative universe, allowing Marvel to reboot them from scratch. Unfortunately, it was a misconceived idea from the start, and is generally reviled by fans. The plan was abandoned and the heroes returned to the Marvel Universe proper.

In the last five years, there's been a serious push to make *The Avengers* the centre-point of the entire line again. Here are all the basics you need to know if you want to start reading...

THE NEW AVENGERS

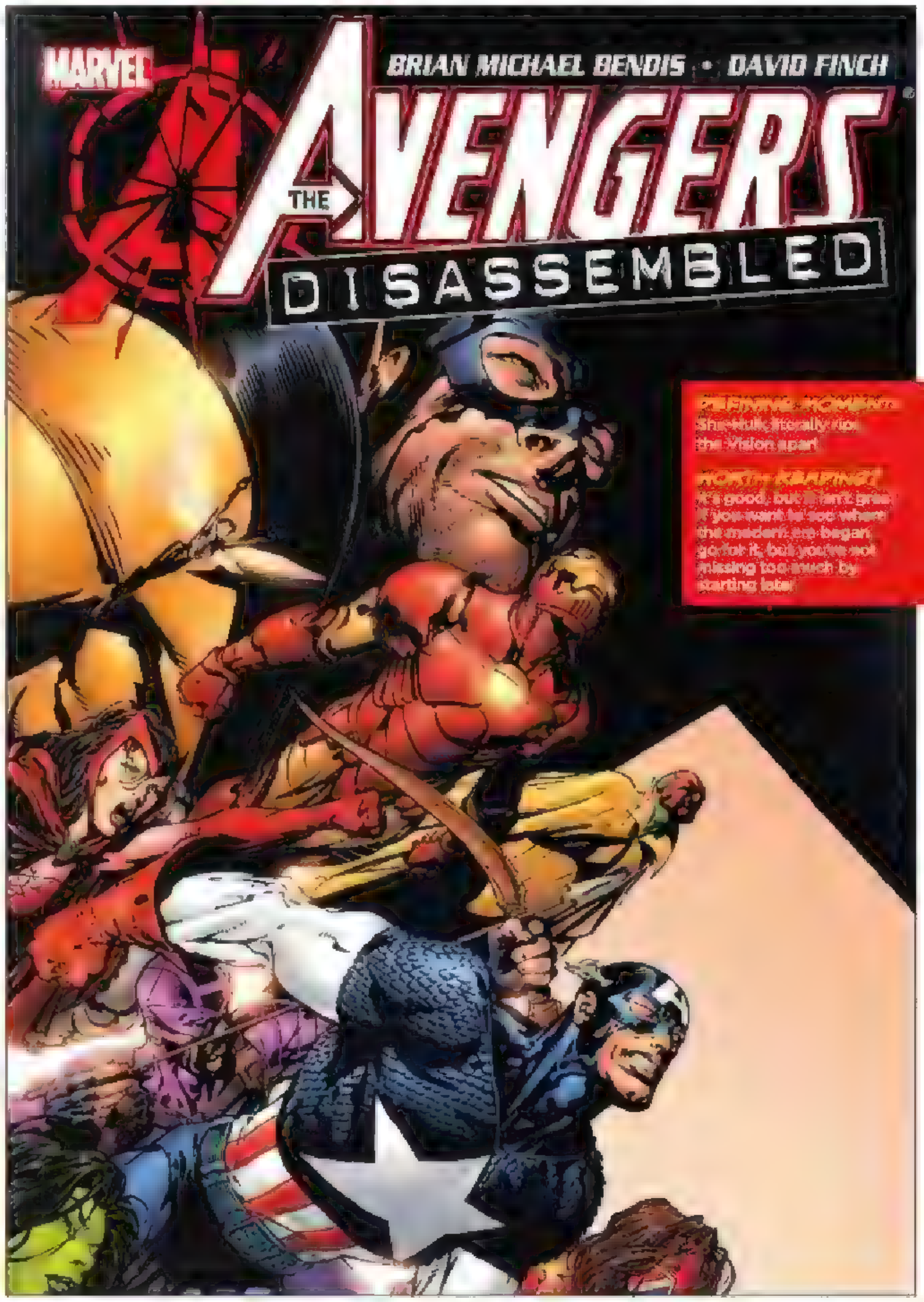
DISASSEMBLED (AUGUST 2004-JANUARY 2005)

Ever had a really bad day? How about a day when the Scarlet Witch goes insane, reveals that her two children were imaginary (but she made everyone believe they were real), takes down each of the Avengers separately (including making Tony Stark suddenly appear drunk in front of the United Nations), makes her former husband fly a jet into the Avengers' mansion, leading to him getting torn apart by She-Hulk, and then has the Kree alien fleets invade?

Yeah, all of sudden, that day the train didn't turn up for half an hour doesn't seem so bad.

While this was a ridiculously over-the-top story, it needed to be. Interest in the team had waned, and this was a way to tie up the loose ends and kick off a new version. Every former Avenger who was still active turned up to join in the fun.

This marked the start of Brian Michael Bendis's five-year plan to reinvigorate *The Avengers*. It would be fair to say that it worked. Although some purists were uncomfortable with Wolverine and Spider-Man joining the team, Bendis wrote the characters well enough, and clashed/meshed them with the other characters easily enough that it seems astonishing that nobody thought of it before.



DEFINING MOMENT
Spider-Man removes his mask on live television
WORTH IT?
It's essential. While some fans have issues with the climax, it's one of the best events Marvel has ever done.
MICHAEL TURNER

CIVIL WAR (JULY 2006-FEBRUARY 2007)

This was the biggest Marvel event in years. It sold an enormous number of copies, created internet forum memes across the world and even made newspaper headlines twice. It's not often a comic story does that.

On top of that, it had a truly interesting premise. The Marvel heroes split over an idea and go to war against each other.

The idea in question? Whether superheroes should be forced to register and enlist in SHIELD jobs, effectively becoming government employees. In return, they would get secure jobs, training and protection for their families.

Iron Man and Mr Fantastic lead the pro-registration side, and Captain America fronts the opposition. As a show of support for Iron Man, Peter Parker removes his mask on live television and, after surrendering to the authorities to end the war, Captain America is assassinated.

The fall-out of this leads to Tony Stark becoming the director of SHIELD, and the registration act being made law, with Stark being the only person with access to the information. The series raised serious questions about the ethics of both sides of the argument. It also led to the New Avengers and Mighty Avengers splitting on either side of the war. This continued afterwards with the New Avengers becoming outlaws, and the formation of the Thunderbolts, a team of former villains led by the Green Goblin, Norman Osborn.

WORLD WAR HULK (MAY 2007-JANUARY 2008)

At the end of 'Civil War', we learn about the Illuminati – a regular meeting of Marvel's leaders to determine what to do about major events. The group includes Charles Xavier, Tony Stark, Namor, Reed Richards, Dr Strange and Black Bolt, and they've come to the conclusion that something must be done about the Hulk. So they decide to shoot him into deep space.

The Hulk lands on a planet, which he ends up ruling peacefully. He gets married – life is good. And then the craft he was sent in blows up, destroying the planet. Oops.

The Hulk is angry, and so is Bruce Banner. The two personalities are working together, meaning an incredibly intelligent version of Hulk who's also 'the strongest there is'. And he's out for revenge on the Illuminati.

Which basically leads to him beating the shit out of everyone, including SHIELD director Tony Stark, who is generally agreed to have handled the situation poorly. This becomes a vital plot point as time goes on. Hulk is only defeated when he and the Sentry, an enormously powerful Avenger, beat each other almost to death, leaving both in their human forms.

OPENING MOMENT
Hulk sits on a throne and forces Earth's heroes to fight in gladiatorial combat for his amusement

WORTH READING?
It's big, dumb fun. If you like big, dumb fun, you'll love it.

All images © Marvel Entertainment

SECRET INVASION (JUNE 2008 - JANUARY 2009)

During a battle between the New Avengers and Hand Ninjas, the ninja Elektra is killed, revealing that she's been replaced by a shapeshifting alien known as a Skrull. With the revelation that Skrull agents are able to replace people with such high levels of security, the Avengers know that the aliens' invasion of Earth has been long planned.

For the first time since 'Civil War', both sets of Avengers must work together. Unfortunately, it's nearly too late, because it turns out that the Skrull have already infiltrated everywhere, including both sets of Avengers, the Fantastic Four and SHIELD. It turns out the Skrull are religious terrorists using the disturbing code phrase "he loves you", and they believe Earth to be theirs. They target and dismantle the Illuminati, and reveal their largest secret – a large number of heroes 'kept hostage' in space for years. Either the current bunch are all imposters, or the Skrull are running a highly plausible double-bluff.

Despite all of this, the big shocker of the series is the finale. The Skrull queen is successfully killed by none other than the Green Goblin himself, Norman Osborn. That, combined with the fact that Tony Stark was seen as making a complete balls-up of his time as director of SHIELD, leads to Norman Osborn being given the top job, immediately becoming the most powerful person in America.

DEFINING MOMENT
Jarvis the butler turns out to be a Skrull. "He loves you." Terrifying.

NORTH IT...
It's a tale of two halves. The first part is superb, all tension and paranoia. The second is a long and boring fight scene. Great ending, though.

Images © Marvel Entertainment

DEFINING MOMENT:
Norman Osborn is defeated, and his mask removed... to reveal that he's painted the Green Goblin mask onto his own face. He's also terrified. "You don't understand... I was protecting you all from him!" he protests, pointing to the Sentry.

WORTH IT?
Absolutely. Unlike *Secret Invasion*, this had an uninspiring start and quickly became really good.

SIEGE (JANUARY 2010–MAY 2010)

The dark reign of Norman Osborn is in full effect. He's changed SHIELD to HAMMER (although he hasn't worked out what it stands for), has taken possession of Iron Man's armour, and become the Iron Patriot. He's also set up his own version of the Avengers (made up of former villains), and declared the unregistered heroes to be totally illegal. Oh, and now he's declared war on Asgard.

Yeah, that last one was probably a mistake.

What he isn't aware of is that Steve Rogers has returned as Captain America, and Iron Man is back in the fray as well (having effectively rebooted himself in order to protect the registration information that was in his brain). As in *Secret Invasion*, the heroes are working together again, and they're looking for a reason to take down Osborn.

Unfortunately for everyone, it turns out that Osborn wasn't the real threat. That would be the Sentry, who's gone insane and is even more powerful than previously thought. Osborn, it turns out, has been trying to keep him under control, and becoming more and more scared of him. It takes the combined powers of all the different versions of the Avengers to take the Sentry down once and for all. Asgard falls in the process, in a quite literal sense.

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BOOSH!

THE SCENE THAT IS NOT A SCENE

You don't need big-name backing to succeed. Matthew Badham delves into the weird and wonderful world of small press comics...

Ask someone in the know about the British comics scene and there are certain things they'll no doubt feel compelled to mention. They'll surely talk about licensed titles like *Doctor Who Adventures* and the *Transformers* comic, while also bigging up the various perennial survivors that populate the newsstands, such as *2000 AD* and *The Beano*. They'll probably also point to the numerous British creators who are currently cooking up an imaginative storm for American comic companies, and it would be wise of them to reference the various original graphic novels being published by book publishers. But all of that wouldn't, by any means, paint the whole picture when it comes to the world of British comics.

There's a parallel comics scene in this country that many people remain unaware of. This is the so-called 'small press', which comprises an enthusiastic crowd of writers and artists who self-publish their work in print and online, then sell it via websites and blogs, at conventions and in select comic shops. Small press comics hold a particular fascination for me. It was self-published titles such as *The Girly Comic* that brought me back into the comics fold in the early '00s (I'd drifted away from the medium in the '90s). I loved comics, but wasn't too keen on superhero titles any more and that was all that seemed to be on offer at my local comic shop. Then, one day, I ordered a copy of *The Girly Comic* on a whim, having seen an advertisement for it in the back of *SFX*. From there, I tried to find out as much as I could about small press comics and soon I was obsessed with the whole scene.

LEFT: Marc Ellerby's *Chloe Noonan, Monster Hunter*. Top stuff!

SCENE CHANGE

Except that it's slightly misleading to talk about the small press as though it's one coherent 'scene'. In fact, it would probably be more accurate to refer to small press comic creators as belonging to numerous scenes, which, due to a shared goal, sometimes »

overlap, interact and cross-pol inate. This shared goal is, of course, to get their comics in front of the reading puolic, but behind that basic urge, there are numerous further reasons why people self-publish

HARK AT THAT

Writer Roger G'bson and artist Vince Danks are the creative team behind *Harker*, which they describe as an attempt to produce "a classic (and hopefully funny) Saturday night television detective show in a comic". For them, self-publishing is a way of demonstrating their skills and dedication to professional publishers. The writer and artist team took a year out from other projects to focus exclusively on *Harker*, so they could ensure that its 12 issues came out on a regular basis

"We wanted to prove that we could actua ly do it and make it a success before pitching it," says Gibson, "so that we could approach a publisher w'th finished work, good reviews and an established audience. It's hard work, because we've had to do literally every aspect of the comic just between the two of us, while making it look professional and mainstream. But we stiil easily got a 20-page comic out every month for a full year."

The duo's efforts seem to have paid off. "*Harker* is currently on a short hiatus," Gibson explains, "because we're negotiating a deal with a major pub isher that we hope will secure the long-term future of the strip and bring it to a much wider audience Once that's finalised, we hope to be abie to start work immediately on a new *Harker* story arc, which is set in New York and gives us the opportunity to lovingly parody our favourite American cop shows."

But *Harker* isn't the only project that the team now have in the pipeline. They've also been commissioned to produce a *Torchwood* strip, a gig that came about because of their self-published efforts.

"That's why I think it's so important to keep putting work out there," says Gibson. "It becomes your professional portfolio and shows that you're serious. It's also the easiest way for editors to see what you're capable of, and it gives them a good idea of what to expect from you in a f'nished strip."

However, although many in the small press do, no doubt, dream of professional pub ication, there are other motivations for self-publishing. For cartoonist Tom Humberstone, who edits the *Solipsistic Pop* anthology alongside producing his own comics, the best thing about the small press is the creative freedom that it offers.

POWER TO THE PEOPLE

"It's very liberating to have complete artistic control. I can publish what I like be it my own work or the work of other artists I adore in *Solipsistic Pop*. There's no sales team to convince, no editor, no marketing department in need of an angle or snappy soundbite."

Perhaps as a consequence, Humberstone's comics cover subjects as diverse as the vagaries of art school education, Crohn's disease (which he suffers from) and American politics.

Of course, the creative freedom that the small press offers extends beyond subject, and also covers issues of form and content. Martin Eden is one creator who's taken advantage of the lack of censorship he enjoys as a self-publisher in producing his super hero series, *Spandex*. The comic echoes the sensibilities of titles such as *X-Men* and *Justice League Of America* in terms of its format and execution, but would be unlikely to find a home at either Marvel or DC. *Spandex* is wonderful fun (I really can't recommend it highly

TOP: Cracking cartooning from Tom Humberstone.

ABOVE: Martin Eden's *Spandex*. Coming soon!

LEFT: A whiff of *Dogbreath*, courtesy of Futureque.

enough), and Eden obviously loves his subject matter. Where it differs from standard superhero fare, however, is in its focus on a gay super team and their antics. The comic features pink ninjas, a 50-foot lesbian and, in one memorable sequence, a mid-slugfest hard-on

"I definitely have been using *Spandex* to experiment with the boundaries of 'mature readers' comics,' says Eden. "A huge twist in issue one is revealed during a fairly graphic lesbian sex scene, while issue three will show two team-mates doing stuff that Rictor and Shatterstar [bisexual characters from Marvel's *X-Force*] are way too shy to do. And I have lots more things on the horizon, but they're all necessary to the story.

KNOW YOUR LIMITS

"I actualy do often censor myself if I think something might go too far, or is unnecessarily gratuitous or needlessly explicit," he continues. "I respect my characters and my readers too much, and I don't want to get arrested! If *Spandex* is picked up by a publisher, I hope they'll print the story as it is and not shy away from the more controversial elements. I could tweak parts easily, but I'd rather the story remains what it needs to be."

Personaly, though, as a reader, the most exciting thing for me about small press comics is the sheer variety of formats on offer; from tiny, handmade efforts with micro print runs to glossy, American-style publications that wouldn't look out of place next to releases from Marvel, Image and DC. That's probably one of the reasons I'm such a sucker for the work of cartoonists like Jeremy Day, Sarah McIntyre and Sally-Anne Hickman, who have all pushed the boundaries of what a comic is and can be. One of McIntyre's offerings, for example, comes in a form of a handwritten, illustrated letter that she wrote to fellow artist David Lasky (appropriately enough, it's packaged and sold in a decorated envelope). Day and Hickman, meanwhile, bedeck their efforts with decorative elements such as glitter and experiment with shape and size (Day once released a teabag-sized comic). The end result is publications that could just as easily be exhibited in a gallery as read.

But for those readers who are less interested in comics that break boundaries, whether in terms of subject, content or form, the small press still has plenty to offer. If you have a soft spot for action adventure titles such as *2000 AD*, for example, then you could do worse than take a look at comics like *FutureQuake*, *Omnivistascope*, *Dogbreath* and *Zarjaz*. These four anthologies present short strips in science fiction and fantasy settings. *FutureQuake* and *Omnivistascope* are composed of entirely original tales, while *Zarjaz* and *Dogbreath* use characters and settings from both *2000 AD* and the *Judge*

TOP LEFT: Sally-Anne Hickman's lo-fi stylings. We love it

THE *COMIC HEROES* BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO THE SMALL PRESS

Interested in getting into small press comics, but don't know where to start? This list of talented cartoonists and their websites should help point you in the right direction...

FACTOR FICTION
www.factorfictionpress.co.uk

The people responsible for, among other titles, *The Girly Comic*. Their collection, *The Girly Comic Book Volume One* was shortlisted for a British Fantasy Award in 2009.

Notable titles: *The Girly Comic*, *Violent*

ARIEL PRESS
www.arielpress.com

The folks behind one of the most popular small press comics of recent times. Known in the scene for their professionalism and perfectionism.

Notable titles: *Harker* (of course!), *Sapphire* (an espionage comic that predates *Harker*)

TOM HUMBERSTONE
www.ventedspleen.com

One of the more interesting new cartoonists to have emerged from the small press in the last few years. Also getting good critical notices for his anthology featuring his peers, *Solipsistic Pop* (www.solipsisticpop.com).

Notable titles: *My Fellow Americans*, *Art School Scum*

MARTIN EDEN
www.spandexcomic.wordpress.com

The creator of *Spandex* and also the critically acclaimed *O Men*. His titles make superheroes fresh and exciting again!

Notable titles: *Spandex*, *O Men*

SALLY-ANNE HICKMAN
www.sallyshinystars.com

Her comics are honest and affecting, as well as beautifully drawn.

Notable titles: *Sally-Anne Hickman Diaries*, *ME*

MARC ELLERBY
www.marcellerby.com

A fantastic autobiographical cartoonist who also makes fiction. His *Chloe Noonan: Monster Hunter* comic was one of my favourite titles of 2009, small press or otherwise.

Notable titles: *Chloe Noonan: Monster Hunter*, *Ellerbisms*

JEREMY DAY
www.jeremyday.org.uk

An Oxford-based cartoonist, whose online publication *The Weekly Strip* sparkles with wit and vigour.

Notable titles: *The Weekly Strip*, *The N Testament*

SARAH MCINTYRE
www.jabberworks.co.uk

Professional illustrator whose self-published work is emotionally literate and optimistic, but never twee.

Notable titles: *Dear David Lasky*, *Airship* (an improvised comic produced with fellow cartoonist David O'Connell, whose work can be found at www.scribblehound.com)

ADAM CADWELL
www.adamcadwell.com

Another autobiographical cartoonist, who's now branching into fiction with his *Blood Blokes* comic – a series about slacker vampires.

Notable titles: *The Everyday*

FUTUREQUAKE PUBLICATIONS
www.futurequake.co.uk

Publishes high-octane action adventure anthologies in various genres, notably horror and science fiction.

Notable titles: *Zarjaz*, *FutureQuake*, *Dogbreath*, *Something Wicked*

PAUL SCOTT
www.omnivistascope.com

One of the most talented writers in the small press. Edits and writes the *Omnivistascope* comic anthology.

Notable titles: The unfortunately defunct *Solar Wind* (as editor and sometime contributor), *Omnivistascope*

WE ARE WORDS AND PICTURES
www.wearewordsandpictures.com

Group of small press creatives dedicated to spreading the comics gospel far and wide. Recently ran events at Legoland and the Latitude arts and music festival.

"I ACTUALLY DO OFTEN CENSOR MYSELF IF I THINK SOMETHING MIGHT GO TOO FAR, OR IS UNNECESSARILY GRATUITOUS OR EXPLICIT"

Dredd Megazine.

"*Zarjaz* and *Dogbreath* are needed because they fill the gap between progs and *Megs*," says Dave Evans, who co-edits the two titles with Richmond Clements, "and they get to showcase creators who are in the process of honing their portfolios for Tharg. There are many writers and artists who started out in the small press, but have since found work with *2000 AD*."

STAR ATTRACTION

This creative traffic isn't all one-way. To Evans's and Clements's obvious satisfaction, several of Tharg's creator droids have sought to grace the pages of *Zarjaz* and *Dogbreath*. Both comics have had contributions from *2000 AD* luminaries such as Boo Cook, Colin MacNeil and Rufus Dayglo.

"There's little to compare to the thrill of having a piece of artwork by someone like Richard Elson, Nigel Dobbyn or Simon Coleby pop into your inbox, especially when you've commissioned it!" says Clements.

The fact that professionals choose to contribute to these fan publications or sometimes self-publish their own comics is a tribute both to the quality of the product coming out of the small press and the vibrancy of the scene generally. The aforementioned Sarah McIntyre is another working artist who continues to make small press comics in her spare time.

"Doing small press comics keeps my work fresh," says McIntyre, "there's much more room for quirky ingenuity. The quick turnaround (the time it takes to make a photocopy) is such a blessed contrast to my other books, which have taken as long as three years to hit the shelves. And the people in the small press scene are such a good laugh down at the pub."

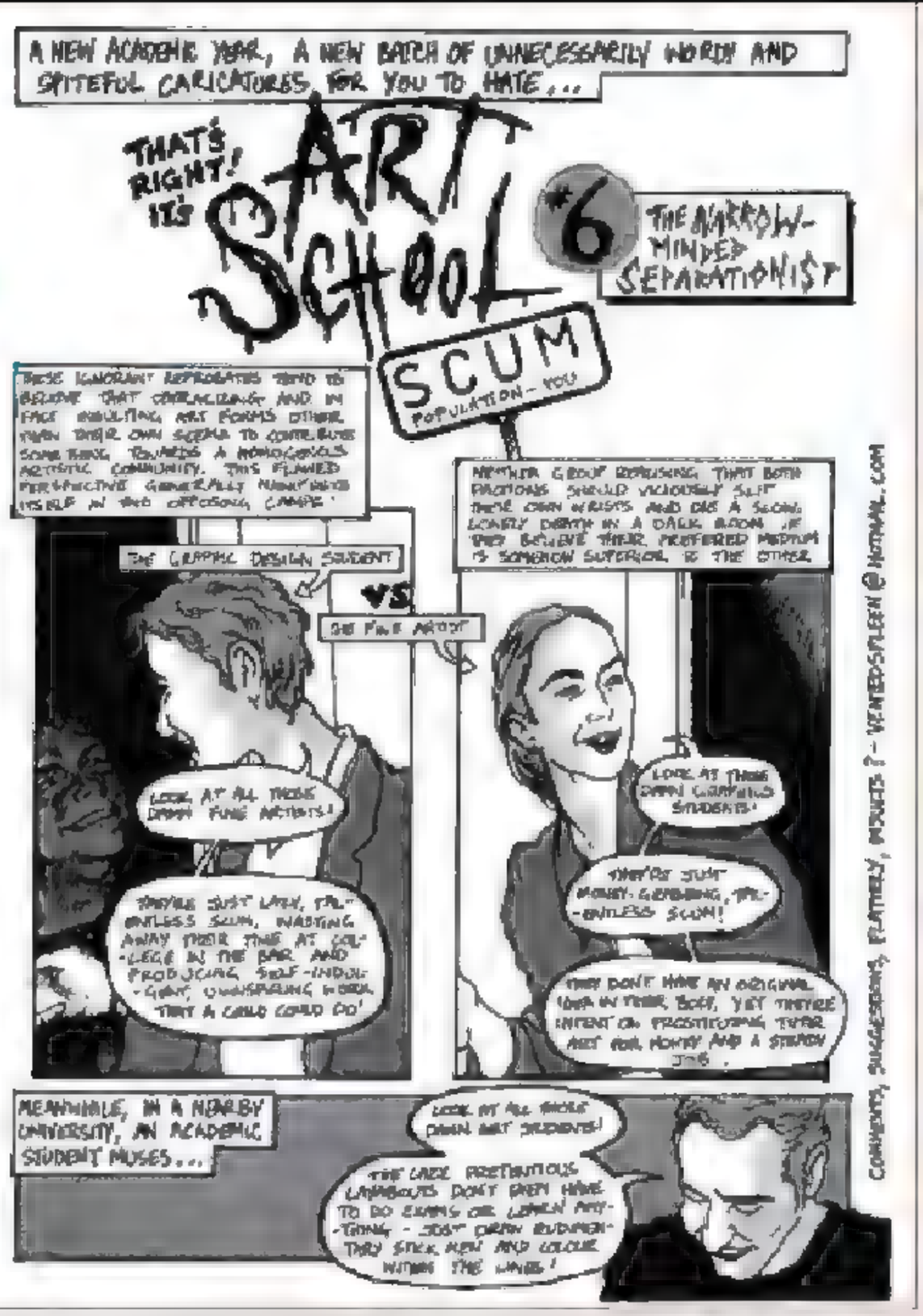
McIntyre's comments remind us that the small press isn't just about comics. In many ways, it's also about making connections with other creative people and the informal social networks that develop around the activity of self-publishing. Networks that are sometimes formalised into collectives such as We Are Words And Pictures

ABOVE: More Chloe Noonan fun from Marc Ellerby. Run, Chloe

BOTTOM RIGHT: A slightly disturbing cupcake lady from Sally-Anne Hickman.

the brainchild of writer Matt Sheret and artist Julia Scheele.

"It all started because Julia and I wanted to bring a pool of creators together who could swap stories and draw interchangeably," says Sheret. "We wanted to become the So So id Crew of comics .. and quickly realised that wasn't going to happen. After a bit of a break in 2009, we used the name to start attending non-comics events to bring our own work and that of our friends to a new audience. Anything from market stalls to live drawing at comedy gigs was fair game; things that might prompt people who knew nothing more than *Batman* movies


A NEW ACADEMIC YEAR, A NEW BATCH OF UNNECESSARILY WORDY AND SPITEFUL CARICATURES FOR YOU TO HATE...
THAT'S RIGHT! IT'S ART SCHOOL SCUM
#6 THE NARROW-MINDED SEPARATIONIST
POPULATION - YOU
THE GRAPHIC DESIGN STUDENT
VS
THE FINE ARTIST
LOOK AT ALL THESE DAMN FINE ARTISTS!
LOOK AT THESE DAMN GRAPHICS STUDENTS!
MEANWHILE, IN A NEARBY UNIVERSITY, AN ACADEMIC STUDENT MUSES...
LOOK AT ALL THOSE DAMN ART STUDENTS!
Comedy, shameless, flattery, mixed ? - Wendesleen @ hotmail.com

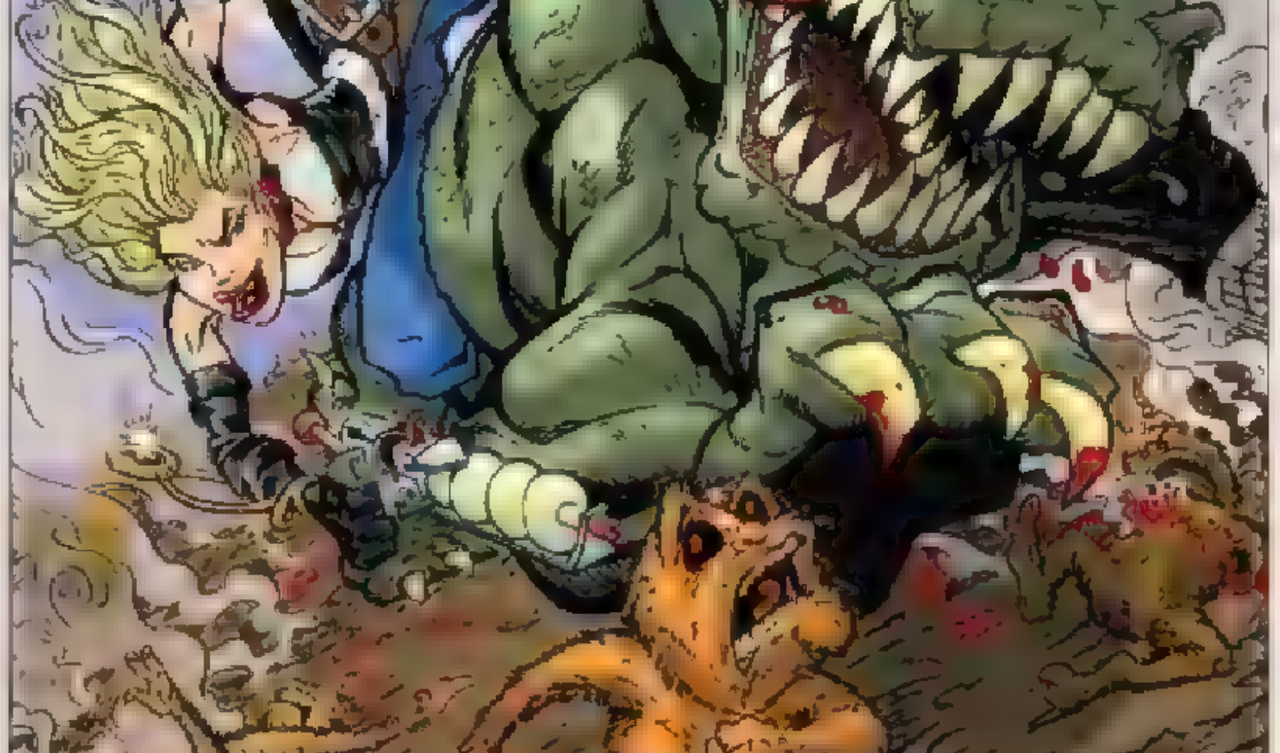
to ask 'So, what's all th's comics stuff about, then?'"

For Sheret, there's something of a sea change going on in Britain at the moment when it comes to comics and the small press is at the forefront.

ABOVE: Tom Humberstone's *Art School Scum*

RIGHT: It's always good to see ladies and dinosaurs together

BOTTOM RIGHT: Sarah McIntyre's improvised *Airship* comic strip



GROUP MENTALITY

"There are groups in Britain (including Manchester Comics Collective, PaperJam Comics and the Alternative Press Fair team) who are stepping outside their bedrooms and doing more for people who haven't traditionally read comics. There's an untapped audience who aren't familiar with their local comic store (if they even have one), and who are getting an entirely

"THE BALANCE IS THAT EVERY ARTIST I MEET AND EVERY BOOK I READ HELPS ME BECOME A BETTER STORYTELLER"

different sense of satisfaction out of the medium. Meanwhile, you've got iconic figures like Warren Ellis paying a lot of attention to the small press. Not only is it really healthy, but it's also really inspiring."

However, one downside of We Are Words And Pictures is that the amount of time Sheret dedicates to the project means his own productivity as a writer is suffering. "I have notebooks of ideas and scripts that will stay in drawers for months at a time, because right now it feels like I should be doing We Are Words And Pictures."

Despite this, Sheret still feels – like everyone else who I spoke to for this article – that his current involvement with the small press is a positive thing. "The balance is that every artist I meet and every book I read helps me to become a better storyteller, he explains. "They open up new ways of looking at comics that I might never have encountered. There's a thrill and wonder to reading *Solipsistic Pop* as it evolves, to seeing a collection like *Birdsong/Songbird* and on my doormat, to watching Julia Scheele grow as a creator, or seeing Marc Ellerby and Adam Cadwell level up and move away from their auto-biographical work. And I love that. I really love that."

INSIDE THE MIND OF JIM LEE

You don't get a retrospective hardback coffee-table book made featuring your artwork with the title 'Icons' unless you are, frankly, bloody good. Rob Williams talks to Jim Lee...

Jim Lee has been one of the best artists in western comics for over 20 years. In 1991, he sold eight million copies of *X-Men* #1, a figure which remains a world record even now.

A year later he co-launched Image Comics, ushering in a new era of creative rights for writers and artists in the American comics industry. A decade on in 2003, he cemented his place as a fan favourite with *Batman: Hush*; he is currently making his living as an international businessman as the new co-publisher of DC Comics.

But it's his dramatic and heroic portrayals of superheroes that made his name. Square-jawed, muscled, noble, aspirational and inspirational – there's something of the American frontier ideal about Lee's depiction of Batman, Superman and co, combined with a sometimes dizzying amount of background detail. So *Comic Heroes* asked Jim Lee why he's the best-selling comic artist of modern times.

COMIC HEROES: **Your initial work for Marvel was *Alpha Flight* in 1987. Back in those early days, who were your art inspirations?**

JIM LEE: John Byrne, Kevin Nowlan, Barry Windsor Smith, Art Adams, Mike Mignola, George Perez, Frank Miller. But I realised after a while that I would literally look at their work and then draw, then look at their work and draw – that I was just aping their style. I realised I needed to find my own style, so I pushed away all their books and forced myself to just draw using my own instincts. For a while, you're drawing the muscle memory of your favourite artists but then you start internalising their style and it gets filtered through your mind and your hand and what comes out is something from your own self. And that's really when your work takes off.

CH: **Looking back at that first *Alpha Flight* issue, what do you think of it?**

JL: Oh, it looks awful (laughs). That's to be expected. Aside from one or two artists – such as Art Adams – everyone's awful when they begin. Unfortunately, you don't think that way when you do it because you don't know anything better. But 'iconic' would be the last word you'd use to describe my work then. At the same time, though, it has its own charm. You see all the rookie mistakes and the energy, the hopes and dreams of my lines, and what they wanted to be but couldn't because I didn't have the ability. It had a lot of stuff going on in the panels, a lot of detail, but that was me over-compensating for not putting in time in composition and shadowing. It's like, 'I want to impress you, so I'm going to draw a *lot* of crap rather than impressing you with my artistry'.

What I've learned over the years is that you have to balance the two, and the work looks its best when you can do that. People love responding to detail and energy and devotion and commitment to the illustration, »

ABOVE: *Icons* is out in October. Save your pennies, comics fans!

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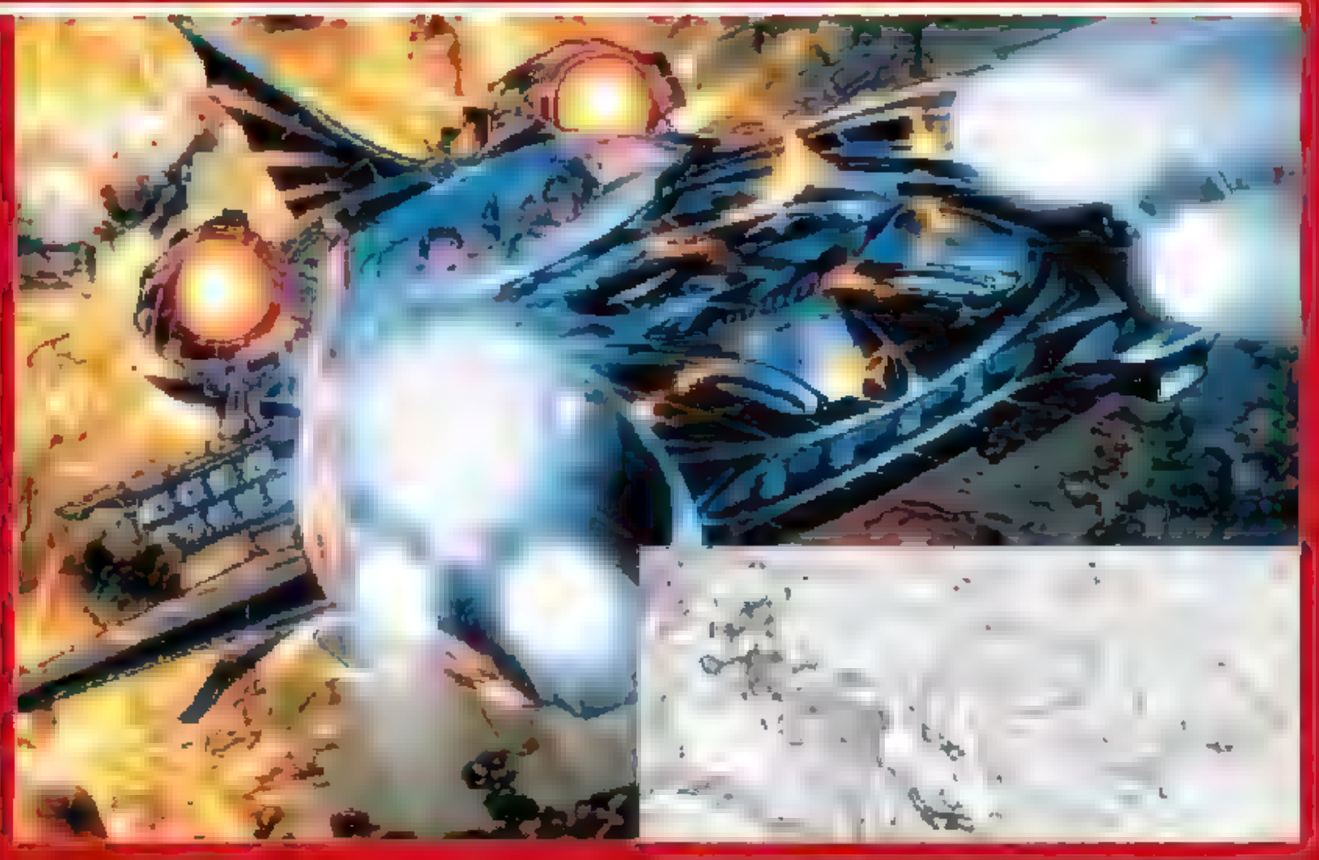

but they also respond to things they don't even know they're responding to. Things like negative space and composition, light and form and shadow and storytelling.

CH: Was there one epiphany piece for you where you thought, 'hang on, I'm getting somewhere here'?
JL: Probably the first page of *Alpha Flight* (laughs). When you create something, you're on the glow of having just created it. When you draw something, you think it's the best thing ever. A month later, you might look back on it and think, 'wow, that was really poorly drawn' – because you've had time to distance yourself from it emotionally and you can see it for what it is. So there's no illustration where I can look back and go, 'that's where I turned the corner', because I honestly thought everything I was drawing was really, really good. But, looking back now, every single piece has problems in it.

CH: By the end of your run on *X-Men* you were also co-plotting the stories. Was that something you'd always wanted to do?
JL: The cool thing with *X-Men* is that it wasn't all that long ago that I was a fan, plotting my own crazy stories, and I finally got a chance to work professionally. Hopefully your stories are a bit better, but you still have that fan enthusiasm for what's going on. So a lot of what we did on *X-Men* was updating storylines I'd loved as a kid, so I had the Brood in there, the Starjammers, the Sentinels. The same thing with *Batman: Hush* – I remembered the great villains, being able to draw the Batcave. It was just as I'd remembered it as a kid, but I was now drawing it with the skills I have as an adult. That's when you hit your home runs. When you can tap into that nostalgia and that inner child, and yet pull it off with your abilities as a fully-grown adult artist.

"YOU HAVE TO ADD SOMETHING CONTEMPORARY AND CURRENT TO THAT NOSTALGIA SO IT FEELS FRESH AND NEW"

CH: Most comics professionals are nostalgists at heart. Those who work on superhero titles, certainly.
JL: Yeah, but if you do too much of that, your work feels very old and dated. It really is about tapping into that energy, but you can't be a slave to it; you have to update it. You have to add something contemporary and current to that nostalgia so that it feels fresh and new.

CH: You were one of the first mainstream American artists to bring manga stylings to your work.
JL: *Akira* was coming out through Marvel and I thought Otomo's storytelling was amazing. In *Appleseed* you can see the influences it had on *X-Men* in the design in the ships and robots and that stuff, the oversized guns. But the other Image artists and partners were also influencing me and they were all into this stuff. It was a big sea of co-influences.

CH: When you left Marvel to form Image Comics (along with Todd McFarlane, Marc Silvestri and others) you'd just sold eight million copies of *X-Men* #1. You were in a profitable place. That was a brave move.
JL: I think that sometimes, when you're young and stupid, it's easy to be brave (laughs). When you're older and have something worth living for – you have children – then it's harder to be brave. It wasn't as hard as you'd imagine, because I always thought that even if this crashed and burned, I would always have this opportunity to work at Marvel or DC. It seemed counter-intuitive. You get into comics, you're working on characters you loved as a kid, you're getting to do all the big books, you're getting healthy pay cheques – more than you ever thought you'd get paid for drawing comics – and then you go and decide you're going to do something on your own. But I really think it spoke for our hunger and ambition, and for our need to control what we're creating. We wanted to control how our drawings looked, the paper they were printed on, the colouring techniques; we wanted to control if they got made into toys and t-shirts and games, because we saw Marvel doing that and we were excluded from having that type of control.

CH: And then a few years later, in 1996, you were back at Marvel with *Heroes Reborn*.
JL: Yeah. You could see the impact we had had on their mentality – they had new management and they came to us and said, 'what characters do you want to work on? We'll let you control and do whatever you want and we'll pay you and give you participation if we do anything beyond the comics with these characters'. It was a huge deal and the level of control they gave with their characters was astounding. It showed how far we'd come.

CH: With *Icons* being a retrospective of your work, which books are you most proud of?
JL: *X-Men*, *Batman: Hush*, *Superman*.

ABOVE: Lee's Batman is instantly recognisable. And impressive.

LEFT: From pencils to colour – in one picture. Clever, eh?

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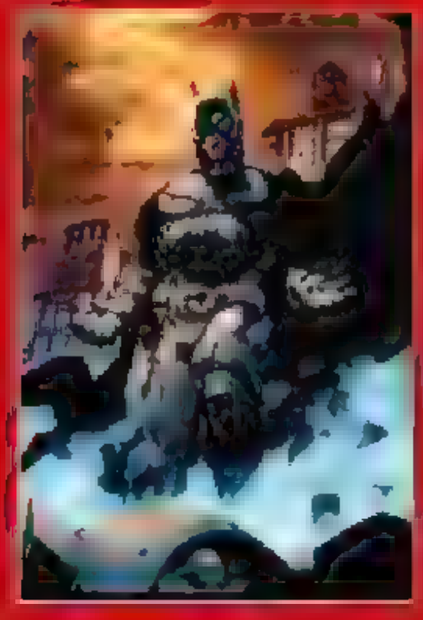

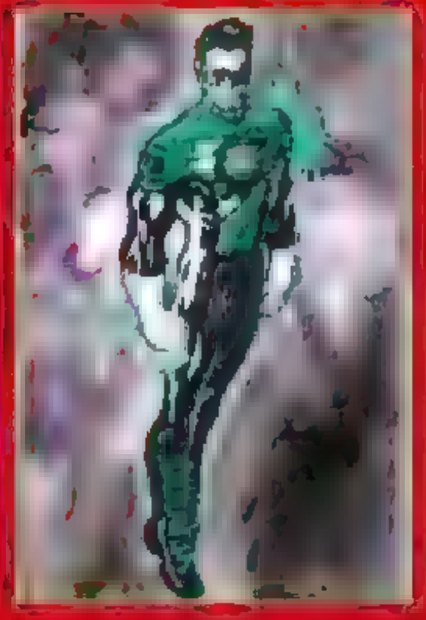

For Tomorrow, *All-Star Batman & Robin*. I like things about all of them. When I'm drawing them I'm thinking, this is the best issue I've drawn, ever. It may not be the case, but...

CH: Your relaunch of *WildCats* with Grant Morrison infamously stalled after one issue, *All-Star Batman & Robin* has been hugely delayed. Despite your popularity with fans, you also have a reputation of not being the fastest artist. Does that bother you?

JL: No, nothing really ticks me off with fan reaction. Whether they write positive or negative things, they're still taking time out of their day to sit down at a computer to write something thoughtful – whether it's mean or full of praise – about my work. I wouldn't be in this position without the fans' love of my work. One of the most rewarding things in life is fans responding to things you've done. People coming up to me now and saying, 'I was a huge fan of your work as a kid; you inspired me to become an art director, a graphic designer, to become an artist'. That's something I never thought about when I got into comics, having that kind of influence.

As for being late, I can't make any apologies. I have the life I have. I do the best I can. I wish I had more runs on different books, and there are certainly artists who produce more, but I can't hack this stuff out. When I get into it, I really get into it – it takes time. In decades to come, people aren't going to go, 'Joe Schmo, remember him? He was the most on-time artist' (laughs). That's not what we're going to qualify people by. A lot of the great comic book series – *Watchmen*, *The Dark Knight Returns* – they all had issues that were very late, but that's not how you *define* them years later.

If you're trying to produce work that will stand the test of time, at the end of the day people are going to read it and judge it on being good or not. And that's what allows me to sleep at night. I don't know if that's a huge rationalisation, but I care more about it being good than whether I'm getting it out on time.

CH: Who's a new, up-and-coming artist that you're impressed with?

JL: I wouldn't say that there are any new guys blowing me away. The same old guys are always blowing me away and I think that's more impressive (laughs). Bryan Hitch still does incredible work, as do Joe Madureira and David Finch. Bryan Hitch has been in the industry for a while now and I don't think he's reached his peak, and that's scary in a good way. Scott Williams is inking his *Batman* stuff for us right now, so I see a lot of it in advance, and it's pretty scary how good it is.

"I WOULDN'T BE IN THIS POSITION WITHOUT THE FANS' LOVE OF MY WORK. IT'S AMAZING"

TOP LEFT: Superman [illegible] who left the top off the milk

ABOVE RIGHT: Lee's [illegible] Wildstorm's Stormwatch created superteam

CH: In your new role as co-publisher of DC Comics, is it a source of sadness that you can't fully devote yourself to your art?

JL: There was going to be a sadness either way. If I were to devote myself to comic book art, I know there'd be a huge part of me that would just miss doing what I'm doing now, overseeing projects like *DC Universe Online* (A huge MMORPG launching in November, for which Lee did the concept art), or spearheading the DC Digital Initiative. Projects like those are people projects.

They may not be projects where you sit down by yourself and draw, but at the same time they do exercise other creative muscles and stimulate other parts of your brain. I'll always want this hybrid, so it's fine-tuning how much personal creative work you do and how much company creative work you do...

CH: You've been in the business almost 25 years now, what do you see yourself doing in 25 years' time?

JL: I'll retire and just draw comic books, travel around the world and draw where I fancy – and maybe it'll be superhero stuff or maybe I'll do something more autobiographical or biographies of my favourite historical figures. Who knows? The great thing about comics is it's not just about superheroes.

Icons: The DC Comics And WildStorm Art Of Jim Lee is released in October from Titan Books; check out www.titanbooks.com

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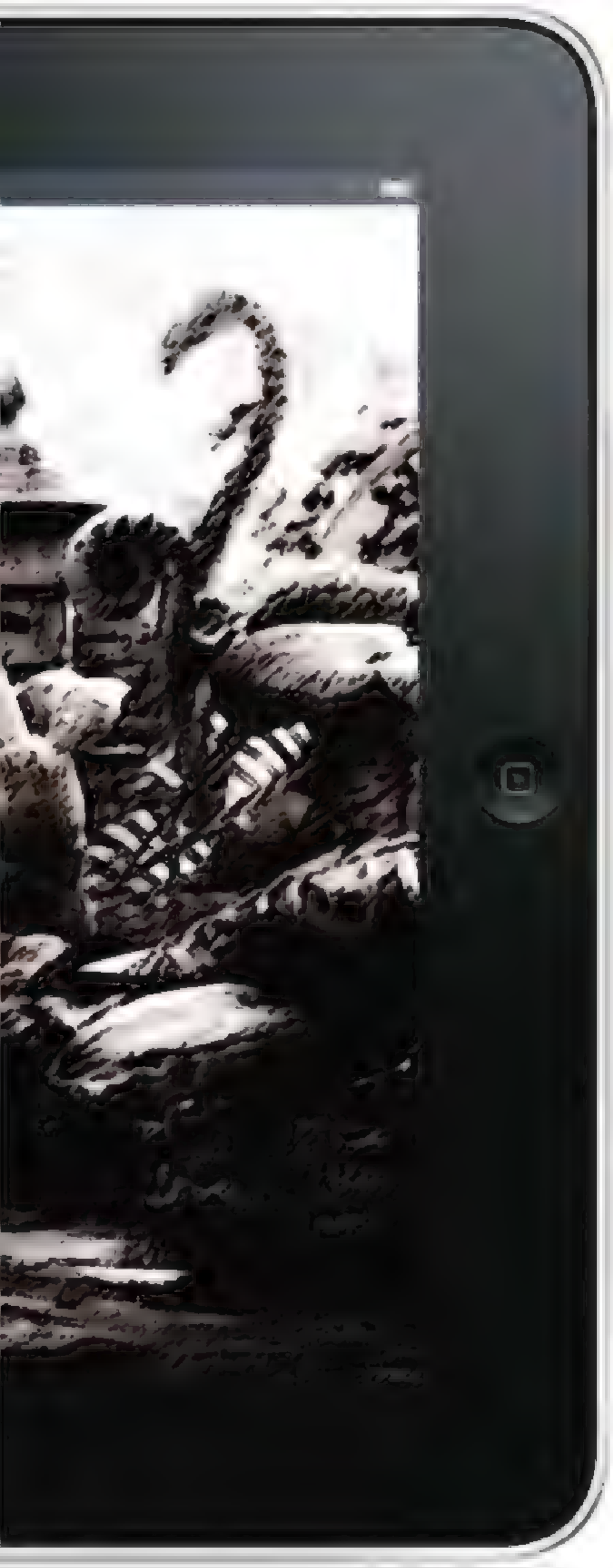


DOWN THE DIGITAL RABBIT HOLE

The advent of the iPad means that digital comics are a reality. So why are they still stuck in traditional narrative forms, asks Rich Johnston?

Maxwell Gaines first had the idea: to take the funnies – the pages of comic strips in newspapers – fold them into four and sell them separately on the newsstand. This is how *Famous Funnies*, the first American comic book, was born.

And that's how they stayed for a while – collections of newspaper strips arranged down each page. Even *Action Comics #1*, the first appearance of Superman, followed that format collecting the strips that newspaper cartoon syndicates had rejected

But before long, publishers, writers and artists realised that they had a whole page to play with. A whole book, even. Narratives that could stretch across the gutter, out across the pages and even could be continued in the next issue. And that was it for about the next 70 years.

And now we have the iPad, enabling people to read and collect comics easily without having to store several longboxes of the damn things in the shed. You can download them in seconds, without the constraint and delay of having to go to a specialist shop, and pay less than cover price, with no shipping or exchange rate charges. So what do publishers do? Well, they put the files of the printed comic directly onto the device, and you move from one page to another, maybe focusing on a panel or two. They call it a digital comic.

THE DIGI BANDWAGON

2000 AD led the way in the UK, selling comic book downloads to all and sundry. Meanwhile, Marvel was a pioneer in the US with its Digital Comics Unlimited subscription line. Together with IDW, Tokyopop, Boom and many more, they've carved a new marketplace online; they've joined the iPhone and iPad generation, allowing people to download comics for below-print prices. DC has also entered the field, and seems to tease readers by releasing certain titles on the same day as the print versions in the USA, for less than they would cost at a shop (and you get them a day earlier than shops in the UK).

But even at their most innovative, digital comics are only replications of the print ones, rather than something created to take advantage of the new media. And the comic book readers »

available seem designed to maintain this status quo.

Even existing webcomics that have been around for a decade, such as *PvP*, *Penny Arcade* and *Dinosaur Comics* try to emulate the printed form when they appear on the screen. The biggest innovation there has been the half page, which fits closer to the landscape format of most computers. DC Comics' now-expiring Zuda imprint of digital comics made that size a mantra.

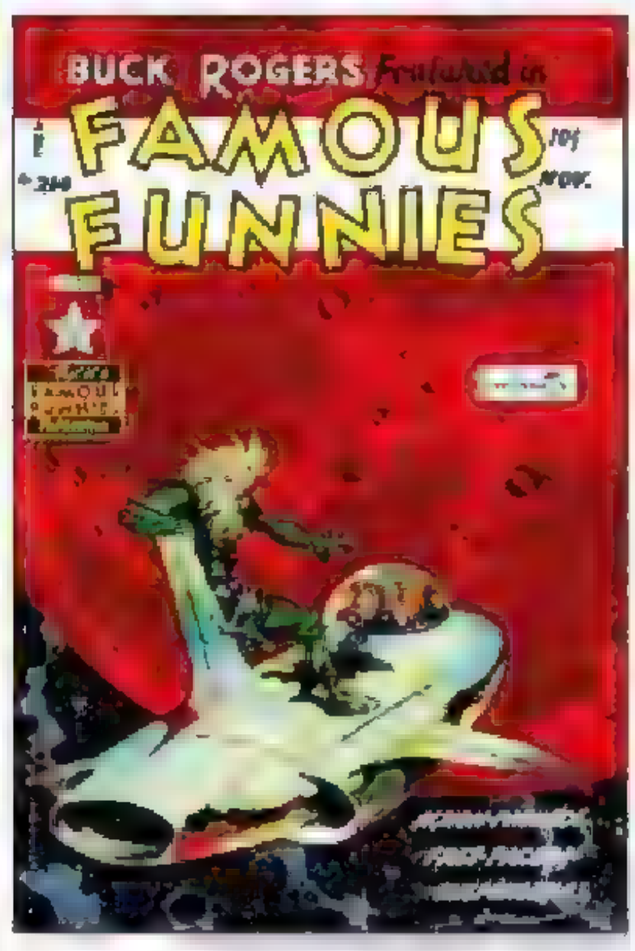
Such webcomics are also always aware that their best chance to make a buck is to get a fanbase and then sell a stack of collected books to it. They also offer a familiar, comfortable reading experience for anyone who comes across the strip, with nothing to challenge or impede.

Suddenly, we've gone back 70 years to the digital equivalent of a collection of newspaper strips on the page. All this technological wonderment at our fingertips and what do we do with it? Show photocopies of slices of dead trees. It's like buying a car and using it to keep pigs in. Sure, it does the job fine, but it might get a bit smelly and, say, wouldn't those pigs like to go for a drive somewhere?

TEST RUNS

Too much writing about digital comics has concentrated on the publishing and financial aspects of the move. Will it be the end of the comic shop? Can publishers successfully monetise their content against a wave of pirates? What price point is acceptable? But what about the very comic itself – what happens when that goes digital? How will the reading experience be altered? And what worlds will it open up?

Al Ewing and PJ Holden have created a series of iPhone comics that give the equivalent of DVD extras. You can peel back individual panels to see letterless, black-and-white and pencilled art, and each narrative includes a game that must be solved before the elusive conclusion can be



TOP LEFT: The first appearance of Superman, already following traditional comic narrative forms

RIGHT: *Famous Funnies*, the first American comic book

reached. But the narratives themselves are very traditional.

The one prominent exponent on the possibilities that digital comics offer is still Scott McCloud, who discussed his thoughts on the matter in his *Reinventing Comics* volume a decade ago. Since then, he's spent a great deal of his time creating them. *The Right Number* is his most recent – a three-part graphic novella to be read online. Each panel embeds a reduced version of the upcoming panel in the centre of the previous one, so you're continually zooming in. It works best when the perspective lines up with the panel you zoom into, and there are moments where an aspect of the previous panel is zoomed in to to make a new one. But it's tricksy, it doesn't serve the narrative that well and the choice of message delivery seems random.

Better is his continuation of print superhero comic *Zot!* as a series of vertical chapters. In a similar style to my *Alice* idea – more on that in a bit – panels are stacked vertically and the reader follows a very visible link from thread to thread. This might make for a very interesting iPad comic. There's no real flow or direction, but there is an awareness of space and distance and how they affect a narrative. McCloud varies the space between panels to affect timing, and even runs parallel narratives next to each other, allowing the reader to experience the different stories as they wish. It feels like a natural digital comic, and publication on the iPad would seem like a logical next step to take. His *My Obsession With Chess* also uses black and white panels, often taking diagonal jumps like certain chess pieces.

But Scott McCloud's theories about expression haven't exactly been welcomed by many webcomic devotees. His phrase "the infinite canvas" is often used with disdain. This isn't what the public want – it's too complex and fussy. People like what they know, even when it comes to digital things. But maybe a new form of narrative is what's needed. I mean, who wanted the tricks that *Watchmen* played before it was published?

"TOO MUCH WRITING ABOUT DIGITAL COMICS HAS CONCENTRATED ON THE PUBLISHING AND FINANCIAL ASPECTS OF THE MOVE"

Take *Alice In Wonderland*, for example. There have been a stack of comic book versions of late as the new Disney film has hit the big screen. One of the classic scenes from that book is near the beginning, when Alice sees the white rabbit and, in pursuit of said lupine freak, falls down the rabbit hole. And falls and falls and falls. It's a scene that takes up a number of pages in a comic, the reader turning the pages to see the next iteration before her eventual crash-landing.

VERTICAL THINKING

The digital versions replicate that, but what if there was another way to do the scene on a digital device?

Imagine a splash page of Alice falling. But instead of being a few inches high, it's thirty feet. At the top, Alice falls, a white-and-blue dressed innocent. And down this impossibly tall page you see many Alices, each one changing slightly, encountering the objects and characters she passes, lost in her own head, until she eventually lands as a very different person indeed. It's not just a few pages, it's a whole book in one panel. Put that on the iPad and let your finger slide down from one Alice to another. You fall with Alice but maintain the control a traditional comics reader has to pause on each frozen appearance, even moving back up the hole if you wish.

This is not a motion comic. There are no added vibration or sound effects. It's completely and utterly a comic, just one written and drawn specifically to be read in a digital format. And possibly displayed in galleries with very high ceilings. All I need is an understanding artist.

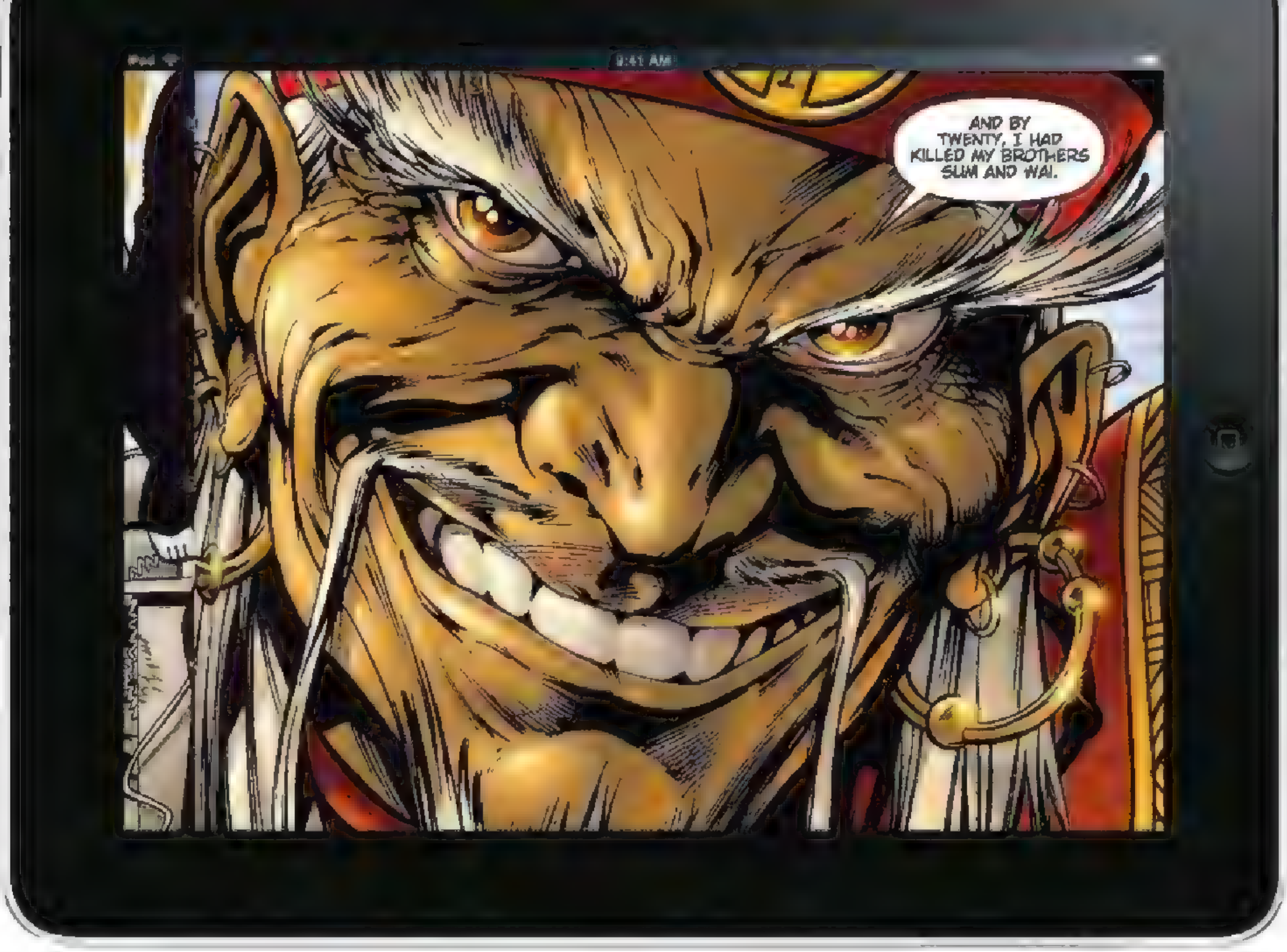
Discussing this concept with Jed Whedon (at least, I think it was Jed Whedon – if it was you, hello again; if it wasn't, you have a doppelganger) in a San Diego Comic-Con bar, he suggested that the character move off in other directions, enabling your finger to follow their progress along different dimensional axes. While I don't think that's right for this particular comic storyline, it probably would be for the sequel. And it would certainly make for a fine superhero comic, especially a single-character title in which you follow the titular lead through a series of events. *Spider-Man* would be a perfect choice, encouraging the reader to swing along with Spidey in one continuing spaghetti-shaped narrative.

"THIS IS NOT A MOTION COMIC. THERE ARE NO ADDED VIBRATION OR SOUND EFFECTS. IT'S COMPLETELY AND UTTERLY A COMIC"

Of course, the person I'd most like to see fall in love with the narrative possibilities – and the man least likely to do so – is the comic writer Alan Moore. *Watchmen* was very aware of the use of panels in telling a story, with repetitive imagery and symmetrical storytelling, even keeping a strict structure until the 'event' at the end, and the series of splash pages creating far greater an impact at the end than if the book had been peppered with them. *Lost Girls* also took the reading experience to new levels, using mirrors, shadows and shoes to draw the eye in and move the narrative depending on whether it was Alice, Wendy or Dorothy leading the storyline. And most recently in *Neonomicon* he's

ABOVE LEFT AND RIGHT: Alan Moore's *Neonomicon* would work as a series of cascading digital panels, right?

RIGHT: More Moore. *Lost Girls* played with narrative throughout its design. Clever



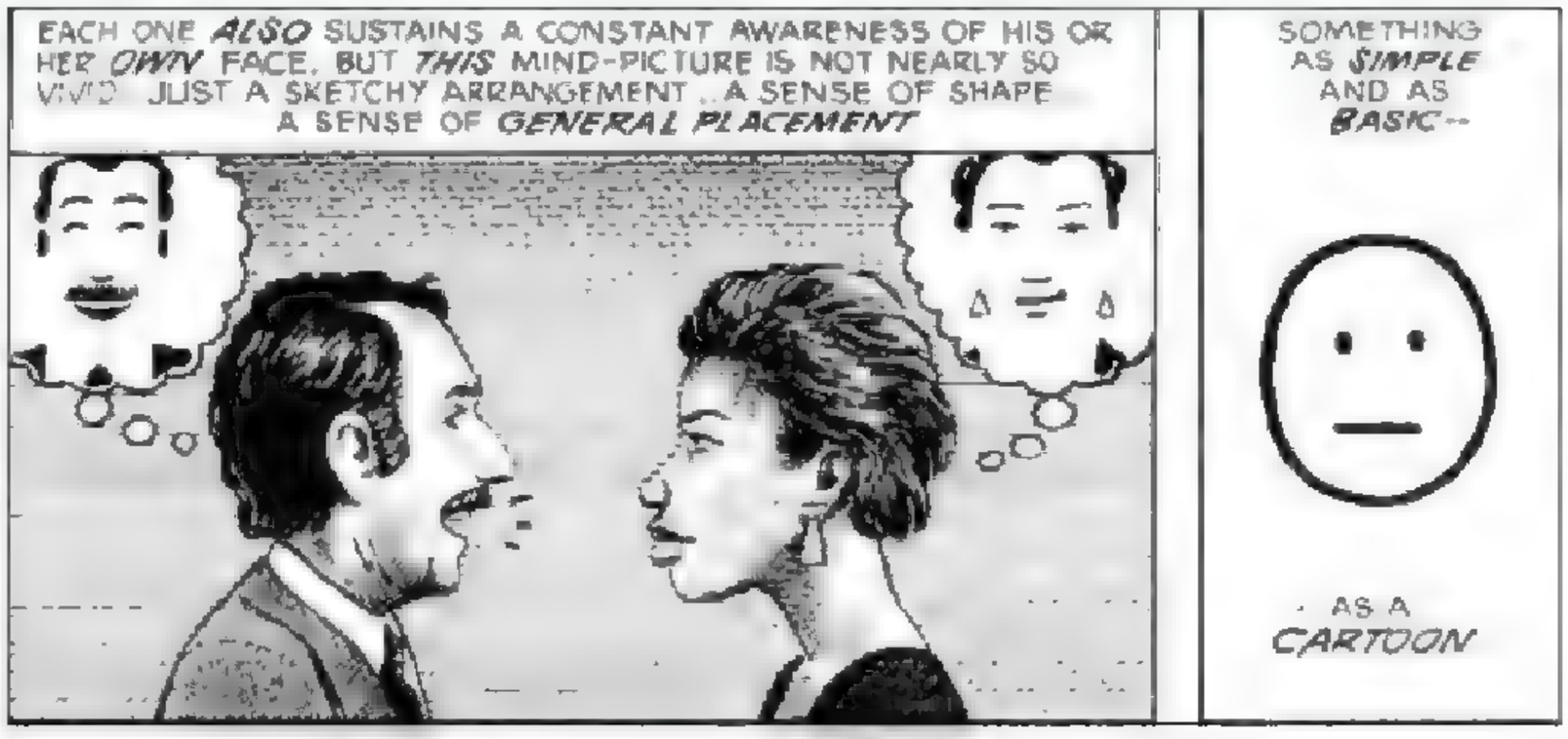
created a world governed by the rules of comics that the characters are unaware of: separate panels of reality appearing as mirrors, windows and doors, with empowered individuals able to move through the very gutters of comic book reality. All good metatextual stuff.

But Alan is rather technologically phobic. He may write on a computer now, but he doesn't use the internet. Online comics probably aren't his thing, and the iPad is a probable anathema. And yet he's got the kind of mind – possibly the best mind in comics – to see all the new storytelling devices this could bring.

Then there's Grant Morrison. While his structural work is more about how separate strands in different comic books contribute to the overall patchwork of a maxi-story (*Batman, Seven Soldiers* and *Final Crisis*, say), he seems like the kind of mind who could come up with something very different indeed for a digital comic.

OVER TO YOU

But the most likely person to grasp the digital nettle is, well, you. Seriously, this is a completely open field at the moment. If you've got a new way to lead a comic book narrative on the iPad, hardly anyone else is trying this yet. Get a pen, jot down a layout and get to work. Hell, use stick figures or cut and pasted photos if you can't draw. Why not make your mark?


EACH ONE *ALSO* SUSTAINS A CONSTANT AWARENESS OF HIS OR HER *OWN* FACE. BUT *THIS* MIND-PICTURE IS NOT NEARLY SO VIVID... JUST A SKETCHY ARRANGEMENT... A SENSE OF SHAPE A SENSE OF *GENERAL PLACEMENT*
SOMETHING AS *SIMPLE* AND AS *BASIC*--
AS A *CARTOON*

Especially if you've got a commercial bone in your body.

I mean, Scott McCloud's work is all very good, but it's slow in coming and is a bit introspective. How about doing a digital comic that's both innovative and commercial? Something with a ninja? Or demon pirate? Or detective robot? Or sexy guy/gal? Just hands off Alice – she was my idea.

As it stands, the majority of the industry is concentrating on making the image on the screen be the printed comic and nothing else, or investing in making it move like a half-house cartoon with varying degrees of success. Oh, and giving Silk Spectre a man's voice. It all just lacks imagination, which, for the comic industry, is a betrayal of form.

It's not like it's hard, after all. There are certain comics, such as *The Authority* and *Neonomicon*, which would work well as a series of cascading widescreen panels on an iPad turned on its side. But in general, we need more comics written for the iPad and other digital screens rather than some attempt to emulate the paper versions. Digital comics are still waiting for their Stan Lee. CH

TOP: Ellis and Hitch's *The Authority* was popularly described as 'widescreen'

ABOVE: *Understanding Comics* by Scott McCloud is essential stuff

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Chewie #4

"I was 12 when *Star Wars* came out, and I've always been a big fan. It was a real thrill to paint a few covers for a Chewbacca mini-series from Dark Horse. I'm pleased with the likenesses here, although Han does look a little like a Mort Drucker drawing to me."

ARTIST PROFILE

INFO
Has illustrated *Hellblazer*, *Sleeper*, *Incognito*, *Criminal* and more

LOCATION
UK

WEBSITE
www.seanphillips.co.uk

THE ART OF...

SEAN PHILLIPS

If noir was a comic artist, it'd be Sean Phillips, thanks to his work on the likes of *Sleeper*. Michael Molcher braves the dark...

One of the idiosyncrasies of the comic book industry is that you can labour in relative obscurity for years before becoming 'the next big thing'. Sean Phillips may have become internationally known for his work on *Marvel Zombies*, but it came after a prolific career already spanning almost three decades.

From the neon nightmare of Mega City One to the dark noir landscapes of the American mid-west, Phillips has produced some of the most atmospheric and distinctive titles in comics – but there's more to him than zombies and gangsters. It was in the humble offices of *The Haverhill Echo* that the 12-year-old Suffolk boy got his first break – he and his friend David Holman simply asked their local paper to publish a strip they'd created. *Sizechanger* was, straightforwardly enough, about a superhero with the ability to change size.

"Hey, we were only 12!" Phillips protests. "We got paid a pound each and the strip ran for about ten weeks, I think. Before the first episode, the paper did an article and photo about us. David and I, along with another friend, Peter Doree, then spent a few years making our own comics starring ourselves and our friends, set in our home town, doing film parodies and some autobiographical stuff. But just for fun, though – we never tried to get them published. And when we were 13 or so, Peter and I started going to Ken's class on how to draw comics."

"Ken" was the late comic artist Ken Houghton, who had worked since the '60s for IPC and DC Thomson, and ran evening cartooning classes. Despite being "only interested in superheroes and barbarians", Phillips learned quickly and at the tender age of 15 he got his first professional job – ghost-pencilling a three-pager called 'Simple Simon' for the *Judy* annual, which Houghton then inked.

GIRL POWER

Phillips went on to work on girls' comics for almost a decade. Comics were very different in the 1980s – *2000 AD* blazed a bright trail, while old titles such as *Battle* and *Valiant* fell by the wayside, and the market for girls was still big.

"It was just a hobby," says Phillips. "I was planning to be a graphic designer or illustrator. I can't remember what family and friends thought about it – I was already the weird, geeky kid [who was] into comics, so drawing them didn't seem that strange."

These comics may have been innocuous tales of teenage romance and mild peril, but drawing them while at school and then art college taught Phillips valuable lessons in storytelling. "The stories in the girls' comics had a wide range of subject matter: from Victorian orphans to ballerinas to contemporary schoolgirl soap opera. It was good training because I had to learn how to draw almost anything, rather than just the rippling-muscled superheroes I'd been drawing for fun. I had to draw teenagers just sitting at a desk or walking down the street – much harder than it sounds.

"Looking back, that early work still looks pretty good for someone so young, although a lot of that's thanks to Ken's inking, I think. I haven't kept copies of my pencils from then, but I'm sure he had his work cut out making my drawings look good!"

There was quite a buzz about *Crisis*, the earnestly political title launched by *2000 AD*'s publisher Fleetway in 1988 in response to the success of *Deadline*, the anarchic 'adult' comic that brought us Tank Girl. Phillips was one of the artists swept along in this brave new world of 'mature' comics, which ended almost as quickly as it had begun.

Phillips met *Nemesis* artist Bryan Talbot through a tutor. Having seen the drawings of Judge Dredd that Phillips had brought with him, Talbot rang Pat Mills to tell him to give the art college student a job – while Phillips was still stood in front of him. Soon, he was in London and working on *Crisis*.

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"It was an exciting time," he says. "*Watchmen* and *The Dark Knight* had come out, and supposedly comics weren't just for kids any more. Within a couple of months I had enough work on *Crisis* to get a mortgage, so I suppose that was when it started to feel like a job! Not that it's anything like a real job. I get to sit at home and draw whatever I fancy and people give me money. I can't complain!"

But John Smith's *New Statesman* and Pat Mills's *Third World War* were quite different and forced a fundamental change in the way Phillips produced his work: "My first few episodes of *New Statesmen* were disappointing. It was a challenge to go from the quite bland way I drew for the girls' comics to something for older readers."

ELDER STATESMAN

"Seeing Duncan Fegredo's first few pages for *New Statesmen* spurred me on to be more experimental with my art. I started painting my pages and using a lot of collage, coloured pencils, ballpoint pen and photo references – whatever worked to get Pat and John's ideas across. Every new script gave me something new and difficult to draw. The artistic challenge was the thing, not the politics."

Phillips had been late to *2000 AD* as a reader, admitting he found it "a bit boring" compared to the Marvel titles that he collected, but by this time he was a full-blown fan and his work for *Crisis* gave him his way in. The title had started to enter its fallow period, precipitated by the departure of *Dredd* co-creator John Wagner, but Phillips was part of a new post-Simon Bisley generation of painters who pushed the now all-colour comic to its printing limits. Moving dramatically away from his work on girls' comics, Phillips fused bold paints with pen and ink so that one moment his pages were lush, almost garish cartoons, while the next they were gritty scratched outlines.

▲ Marvel Zombies

"*Marvel Zombies* made me an overnight success after drawing comics for 25 years. It was a nostalgic rush to draw childhood favourites, even as zombies."

The newly-launched monthly *Judge Dredd Megazine* aimed to be a more brutal, adult take on Dredd's world. The title was awash not just with Phillips's art, but also his design work. The lines between the comic pages and the medium that framed them were blurred by joke adverts, public safety announcements, calls for collaboration from the sinister smiling Judge Pal and mock Mega City One newspapers – all lovingly twisted and rendered by Phillips.

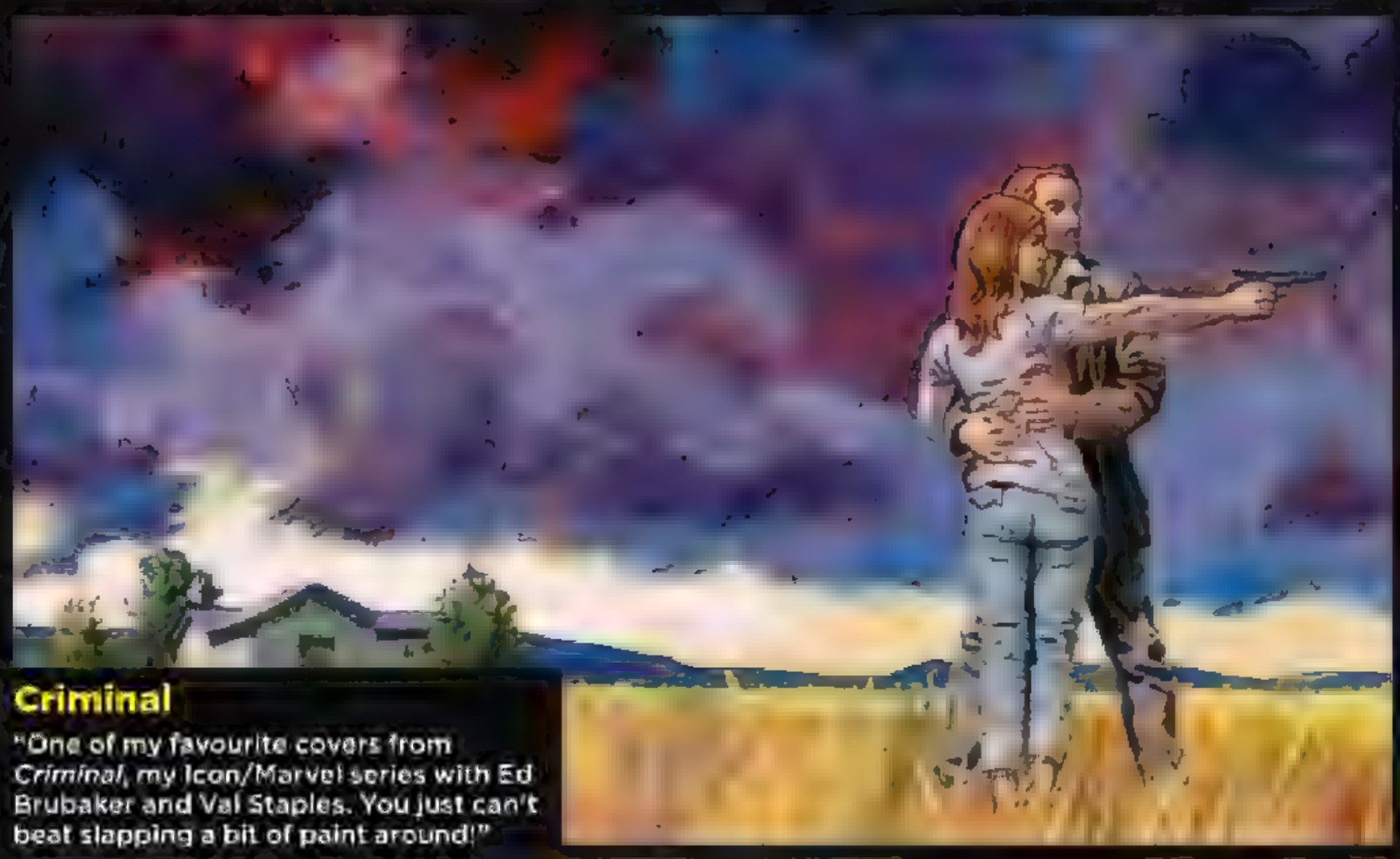
"Living in London meant I'd deliver my pages to the offices every week, so I picked up a lot of extra work just by being in the right place at the right time, I think. I had a degree in graphic design, so doing logos and design for the *Judge Dredd Megazine* was a good use of those skills.

"Simon Bisley was a big influence once I'd started painting comics, although the biggest changes to my style came about from the sheer volume of pages I painted. Seeing how things did or didn't work in print, and being young and out to prove myself made the work change too."

Although labelled as part of the so-called British Invasion, Phillips was just part of the decade-long exodus of major British talent to the American comic book market. John Smith and Phillips pitched a Joker graphic novel to renowned DC editor Karen Berger at a UK comic convention in 1989. Despite rejecting the pitch, Berger contacted Phillips months later and offered him an issue of *Hellblazer*.

"I might have been part of the second or third British Invasion, but it really didn't feel like that. I was still doing plenty of stuff for *2000 AD* and it took a couple of years before I had enough work from *DC* to feel secure there. That issue of *Hellblazer* was very exciting, though. It did feel like I'd made it a little, drawing a real American comic book."

Returning to the UK, he was a mainstay of both *2000 AD* and the *Judge Dredd* monthly, producing the first series of Dave Stone's *Armitage*,



Criminal

"One of my favourite covers from *Criminal*, my Icon/Marvel series with Ed Brubaker and Val Staples. You just can't beat slapping a bit of paint around!"

▲ **Conan study**

"I've said yes to a Conan mini series for Dark Horse in the near future. This was done in my sketchbook to test the technique I've got in mind – oils on paper. I must be mad."

▲ **Simple Simon**

"This was my first pro work published in the 1984 Judge annual but drawn in summer 1980 when I was 15. Pencils by me and inks by Ken Mogford. It wasn't Spider-Man, but it's a start."

Devlin

"Deep in my painted period for *2000 AD*, Bisley was a big influence on a lot of us then. Devlin was a great character; John Smith created something original there."

a take on *Inspector Morse* set in an insane future Britain, along with John Smith's gay Vatican exorcist Devlin Waugh. He returned to the US for spells on *Hellblazer*, and eventually made a connection with a writer to whose fortunes he has become inextricably linked: Ed Brubaker.

The pair first worked on Brubaker's *Scene Of The Crime*, for which Phillips provided inks. The artist then worked on WildStorm's *Wild CATs* before joining Brubaker on *Sleeper*, in which undercover operative Holden Carver infiltrates an evil organisation set within the WildStorm universe. It was a major success for them both and cemented their working relationship.

"He just writes things that I like to draw," says Phillips. "We trust each other to each do our best for whatever book we're working on. Even though we've worked together for over ten years, we rarely speak. I've spoken on the phone to him maybe twice; it's all emails nowadays.

"We meet up at conventions around the world every year or so, and my wife and I went to stay with him for a while as we were putting *Criminal* together. It made for a very boring trip for her and Ed's wife, while Ed and I talked about everything *Criminal* for a week! Hopefully Ed and I will always get to work together, either on *Criminal* or *Incognito* or something new. I've no intention of leaving him for another writer."

That relationship has never been more fruitful than in the dark, vicious pages of *Criminal*, Brubaker's noir-ish crime series for Marvel's Icon imprint. Slow-burning, uncompromising and evocative, *Criminal* focuses on the criminal underworld, set in the present day but still a place full of washed-up thugs, last-chance criminals and double-crossing dames from the '40s and '50s. Phillips's brutal line art matches the stories perfectly, with deep shadows full of menace and painfully realistic violence. Among the monochrome series' highlights have been the large pieces he paints

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to accompany text features focusing on key noir films of the past. Moody, evocative, brooding – each painting not only replicates an image from the featured film, but also deftly mimics its atmosphere.

"Most of the films and books I've illustrated for the *Criminal* features were new to me. Ed's really into all that stuff, but it's been an education for me. I don't know how he has time to watch all those movies!

"I've always liked the look of film noir, and it's influenced the way I draw. I first started looking at it seriously when I was the regular artist on *Hellblazer*, although I've always liked comic art with a lot of black on the page. *Sin City* and *Stray Bullets* before us already had that dark sensibility, but mixed with a more stylised, cartoony approach. With *Criminal*, I just tried to make things look as believable as I could without letting the art get in the way of the story. My style isn't naturally flashy, and it always looks dumb when I try to be.

"The illustrations for the back-up features are where I get to cut loose a little. I always do them after finishing drawing the story pages, and it's an excuse to try a new technique or style. Somewhere to just have fun painting."

ART ATTACK

With such a strong back catalogue, it's ironic that Phillips's best-selling book was based on a throwaway Mark Millar story that he didn't even draw. Robert Kirkman was brought in to pen a five-part series based on the idea (devised by Millar during his run on *Ultimate Fantastic Four*) that superheroes on Earth have become flesh-eating zombies after being infected by an alien virus. Illustrated by Phillips, the combination of crowd-pleasing zombies and the nihilistic joy of seeing previously indestructible heroes being slaughtered was a massive hit and *Marvel Zombies* became a phenomenon in its own right, spawning sequels, prequels, crossovers and merchandising. Its success came as a complete surprise, not least to the artist.

"The success of *Marvel Zombies* was unexpected," he admits. "We had no idea it would be so popular. It was fun to get so many classic Marvel characters to draw, even if they were zombies. I still like the first series I drew and the *Dead Days* prequel. The sequel maybe wasn't as good, but I still had some cool stuff to draw.

"The original art to a lot of those splash pages was easy to sell. In fact, the royalties and art sales enabled me to take a risk on drawing *Criminal* for a possible back-end payment. The Icon deal works a lot like Image: no page rate upfront, maybe some money later if your books sell enough copies. Luckily *Criminal* did, so we can carry on. I was never really into zombies though. I've never seen a zombie movie apart from *Shaun Of The Dead*. Not much of a horror fan at all really."

Despite having been 'discovered' by the mainstream US superhero-reading public, Phillips seems keen to continue his own path with projects that play to his strengths, rather than satisfy the craving for yet more zombies. He's currently working on the next series of *Incognito*, the dark pulp superhero series for Icon written by Brubaker and due out in October. There's more *Criminal* on the cards, a 'sci-fi album' for French publisher Delcourt and a *Conan* mini-series for Dark Horse.

His style has developed over the years, but his ability to adapt has remained: "Hopefully my art changes a little to suit each story I draw," he says. "The one time my art changed a lot was when I went from drawing *Kid Eternity* to drawing *Hellblazer*. I went from a smooth, linear style to the dark, scratchy stuff I've done ever since. Since then any change has come from hopefully getting better at what I do.

"Nowadays I use a brushes a lot more than pens, so that's made it look more painterly. I'm always striving to strip away what's not needed – to simplify everything to a minimum of brushstrokes. Seeing Duncan's *New Statesmen* pages for the first time all those years ago made me realise that anything is possible. Any tool can be used to make a mark, although it might take years to find out what that tool is. Duncan's stuff has always been exciting, and I wanted some of that to rub off on my work. We have a lot of the same influences, but we've taken different things from them to apply to our art. Our work doesn't look much alike, but it's informed by similar tastes and influences.

"I feel, after 30 years, I'm getting close to being able to get down in black and white what's in my head. With painting though, every time I start a new piece it feels like I've forgotten how to do it. Painting is just so difficult!"

▲ Sleeper

Soon to be a movie from Sam Raimi and Tom Cruise. Maybe. Hopefully I'm not holding my breath.

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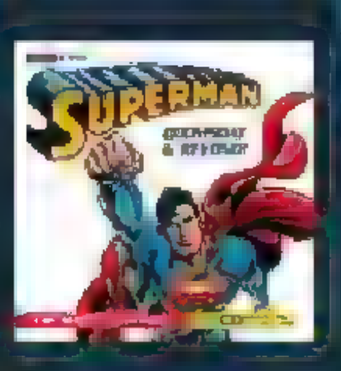

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DESIGNING THE X-MEN

Bringing the best-selling mutant franchise from comic book to big screen was a long and sometimes frustrating process... By Joe Nazzaro

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There used to be a misguided idea within certain Hollywood studios that turning a well-known comic book into a successful film franchise is a relatively simple task. After all, you have several decades' worth of stories that could be hammered into scripts, and the panels can provide inexpensive storyboards for the action. And, of course, modern technology is able to tackle anything as far as a character's superpowers are concerned. Simple, right?

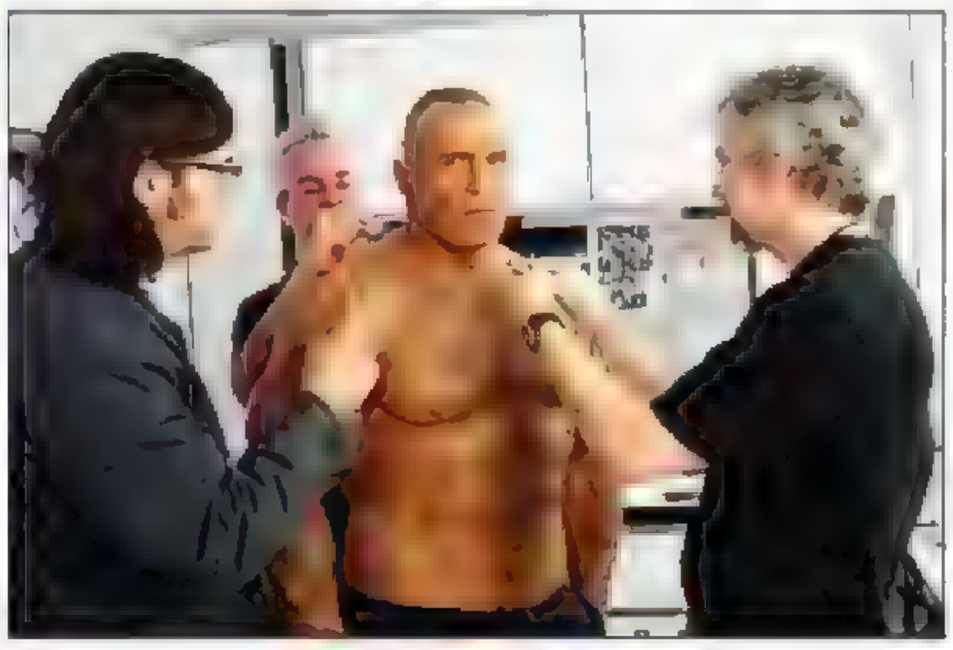
As some of those ill-advised executives soon discovered, it's anything but. While a comic book can be transformed into a working script without too many headaches, the actual look of a character is deceptively difficult to capture. The very artwork that moves so well on a printed page just doesn't translate into cinematic fare, while the exaggerated physique and colourful costumes of the average superhero look downright ridiculous on a big screen. That's why the line about yellow spandex in the first *X-Men* film always gets a laugh.

In fact, the *X-Men* films have become one of Hollywood's most challenging franchises from a visual standpoint. With literally hundreds of characters drawn by a legion of artists over nearly five decades, there are countless interpretations to work with. But how do you create a three-dimensional version of Nightcrawler, for example? Or the Beast? Or Colossus? And if you make too many changes, sensible or otherwise, to those personas, doesn't it invite the collective wrath of comic book fans?

SLOW GOING

"The reason that people have been reading the comics for 40 years or longer is because those characters were designed so well from the beginning," claims designer Jose Fernandez, who's worked on characters for the *Batman* and *Fantastic Four* films, as well as *Daredevil*, *Hellboy* and *Watchmen*. "They've been tweaked over time, but they're still great, so why would you want to change them so much that nobody recognises them? I've never understood that."

Over the course of four *X-Men* films, including the recent Wolverine prequel/sequel spin-off, a veritable army of craftsmen and technicians have been taking the franchise's two-dimensional comic book characters and bringing them to three-dimensional life. It hasn't always been an easy task, but that creative aesthetic is one of the key



Painter Tim Gore adds minute details to a Beast maquette

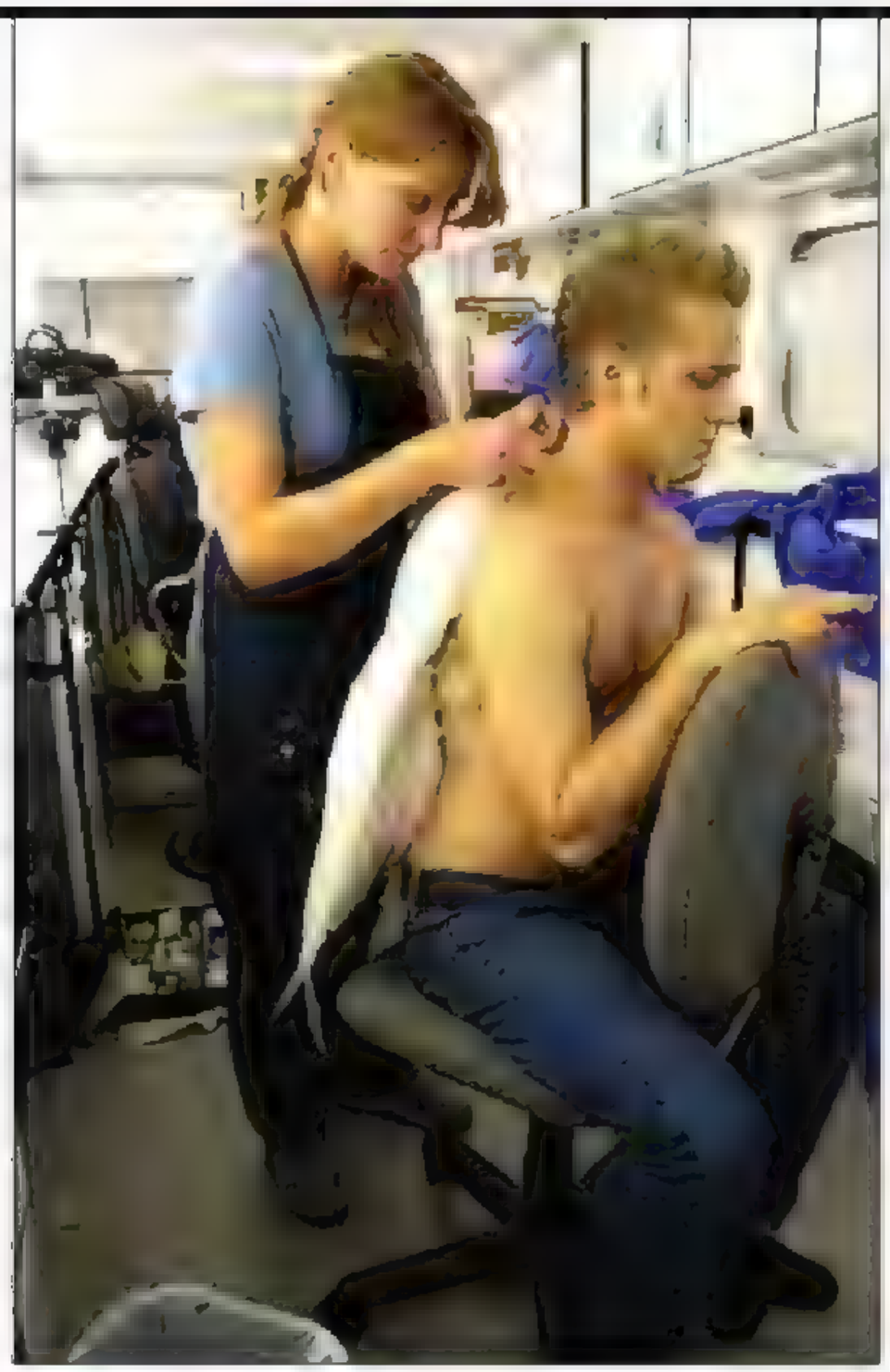
Make-up artists Norman Cabrera, Bart Mixon and Thom Floutz apply final touches to Vinnie Jones's Juggernaut

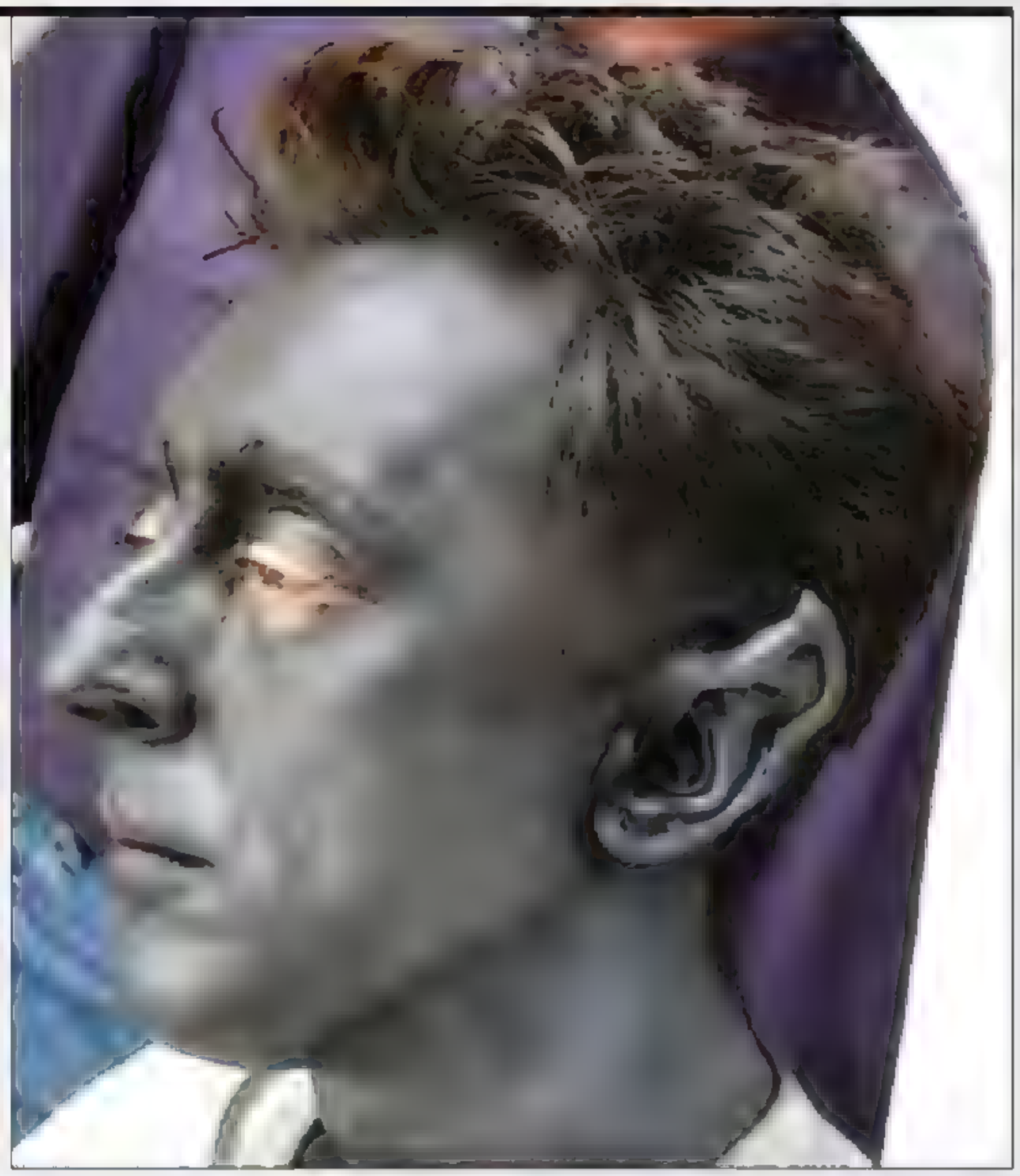
reasons behind the series' huge on-screen success.

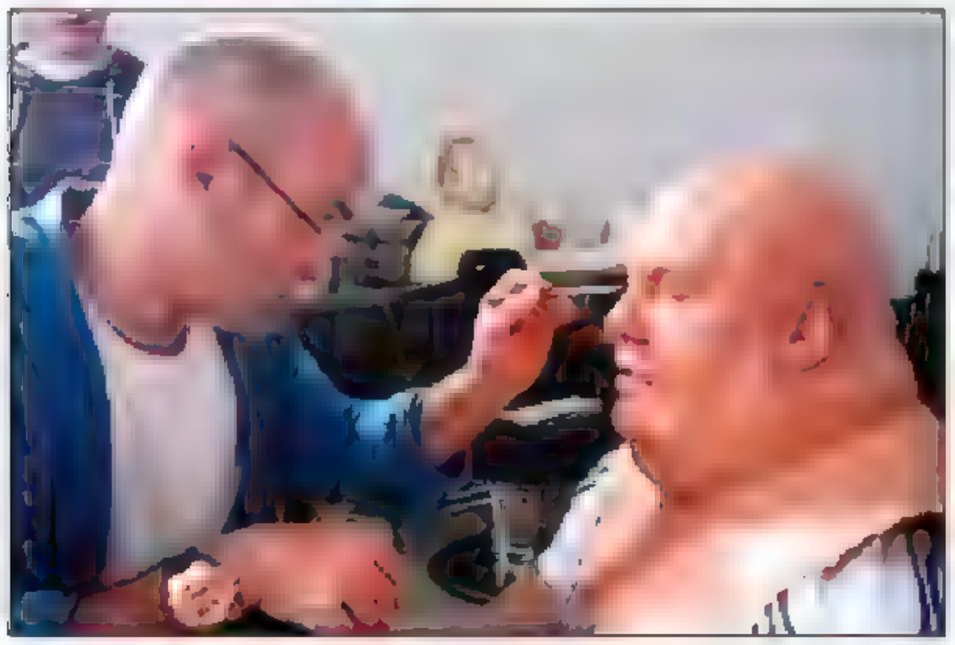
The process began a decade ago with the first *X-Men* film, when the designers started working out looks for various members of the team, comprised of mutants from the original '60s comic book as well as the '70s relaunch. "There was one character that we took out at the beginning to save money, and that was the Beast," recalls make-up effects artist Gordon Smith, whose Toronto-based company FX Smith was responsible for several of the X-Men as well as members of Magneto's Brotherhood of Evil Mutants.

"He was only in the background for two quick scenes, so the amount of money it would have cost to build him didn't really make any sense," Smith explains. "For the other characters, we went through a lot of exploration. Nothing was hard and fast, aside from

"THE X-MEN FILMS HAVE BECOME ONE OF HOLLYWOOD'S MOST CHALLENGING FRANCHISES FROM A VISUAL STANDPOINT"







the hardness and fastness presented by the comic books. The simple rule was to try and execute the characters as if they could exist; you could pass that guy on the street and maybe not look at him twice."

Well, maybe not all of the characters. With Mystique, for example, played by Rebecca Romijn-Stamos, it was just as well the character had shape-shifting abilities. Otherwise, the sight of a naked blue-skinned woman would have been disconcerting to say the least. "[Director] Bryan Singer wanted a nude blue girl with scales," claims Smith. "That was the mandate. We did everything we could to try and present the character closer to the comic book and give her a sexy outfit, but Bryan was very insistent about it.

"That was actually kind of cool, because it made us figure out how you actually do that without it looking stupid, and it worked out pretty well. It was a pain in the ass for the actress, because it was a minimum of six hours every day to get the thing on. It started at ten hours and we got it down to six, but that's still a very long time, and her whole body was airbrushed afterwards, which is a terrible thing to have to do to somebody."

TOP LEFT: Lead Angel artist Robin Dufay blends feathered wings onto actor Ben Foster

TOP RIGHT: Alan Cumming transforms into Nightcrawler

ABOVE LEFT: Kevin Durand turns to the prosthetics for his role as the Blob

ABOVE RIGHT: Lead artist Jose Fernandez attaches a rigid mask to Colossus actor Daniel Cudmore

SPECS APPEAL

In order to follow Singer's order, Smith devised a series of self-sticking silicone prosthetics that were airbrushed with a waterproof, alcohol-based Temptu make-up. "It looked like her whole body was covered in paint, but I would say two-thirds of it was platinum-grade silicone prosthetics," says Smith. "We were taking a big risk by using that technology in the film, because it had never been done before. But, at the end of the day, it turned out really well because of those prosthetics. They self-stuck, looked like tissue and I got to reuse them every day."

Some of the other cast members were a bit more straightforward Sabretooth (Tyler Mane) required a forehead prosthetic, wig, teeth and clawed gloves, while Toad (Ray Park) was given a mustardy-yellow food colouring cover-up, an extendable tongue that was replaced digitally and a pair of glasses with magnified lenses that were subsequently abandoned.

"The premise was that, at one point towards the end of the movie, when Storm is blowing him off the Empire State Building, his glasses fall off momentarily," recalls Smith. "He pushes them back on, but for that brief moment, we realise that they aren't lensed glasses at all, he actually has eyes that big and the glasses are there so he can blend in to normal life.

Unfortunately, there was a comment that he looked like Elton John, so they decided to take them away, which was a shame. I thought it was a big opportunity lost for that character."

One of Smith's more intriguing challenges for the film was to build a series of mechanical arm devices to simulate Wolverine's claws emerging from his skin. Although the sequence was largely replaced with digital effects, Singer wanted a live-action element that could be shot whenever it was needed. "It turned out to be a very simple apparatus, in which all the blades were custom-made to perfectly fit that space between each knuckle. Then they went off into thin, hardened steel rods in a grip that Hugh held in his hand. The harder he squeezed, the safer the piece was.

"They originally wanted me to build the claws out of metal, but I refused, because having six Ginsu kitchen knives around a film set would just have been ridiculous. They had to be rig'd, so we built them in plastic and injection-moulded them so we could make hundreds at a time.

They worked well enough that a friend of mine said, 'Metal looks like metal, plastic looks like plastic, and never the twain shall meet.' I said, 'Yeah, but you gave me the job of making the plastic look like metal.' He said, 'I'll bet you any amount of money that I can tell the difference,' and I said, 'You're on! How much? Twenty bucks?' I went out to the trailer and got the two hand rigs, took three metal blades and three plastic blades and mixed them up on each hand. I came out, showed them to him and said, 'You tell me, which ones are the metal blades?' And he pointed to the plastic ones!"

After the success of the first *X-Men* film, a sequel was all but inevitable, and Singer soon returned for *X2: X-Men United* along with key members of his production team. Most of the principal cast from the previous instalment were also returning, with the notable exception of Nightcrawler, a fan favourite from the comics who proved somewhat difficult from a design and make-up perspective.

> "WITH BEAST, WE CAME UP WITH A DESIGN THAT EVERYBODY LOVED"

TESTING TIMES

After going through a number of different concepts, Singer introduced the idea of using Maori battle tattoos to add an extra dimension to Nightcrawler. Working with production designer Guy Dyas and his team, Smith refined the concept to a series of raised tattoo patterns that were created with lines of directly applied silicone under various coats of make-up.

While Smith concentrated most of his efforts on character elements, such as Nightcrawler's prehensile tail and oversized feet and hands, key make-up artist Charles Porlier oversaw countless product combinations, trying out colours, changing highlights and even adding metallic paints to create a different look. "Bryan was very much in the driver's seat," remembers Porlier, "to the degree that when we were trying to decide what colour to paint Nightcrawler, Bryan was adamant that the make-up be very dark in terms of value. We ended up doing 16 different camera tests, and Bryan looked at every single one and was very specific about what he wanted."

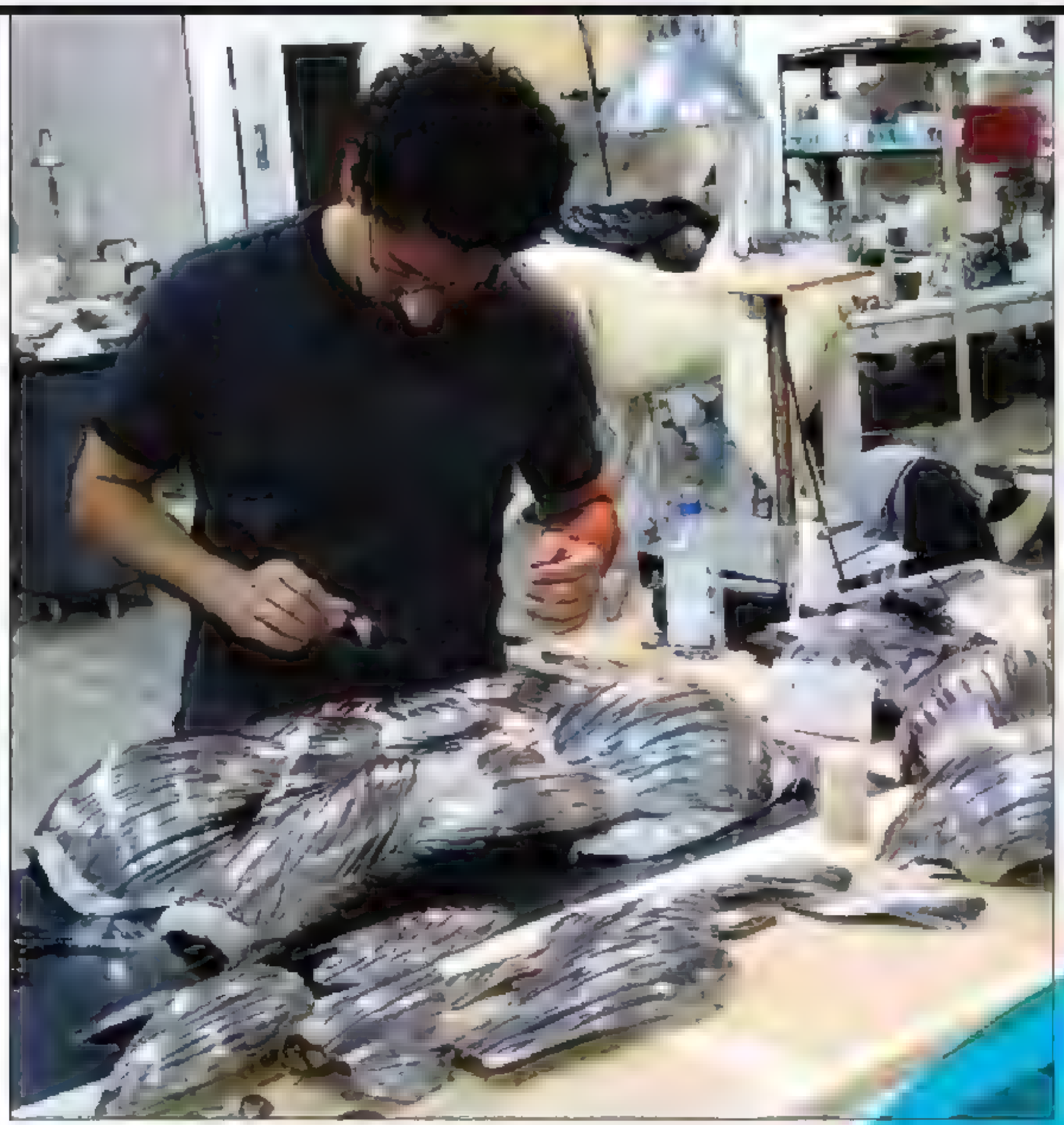
Ironically, while many people tried to replicate Nightcrawler's blue skin tone from the comic, they failed to understand that the blue was merely a highlight colour because the cheap paper couldn't reproduce proper blacks. "Bryan actually brought that up, so that was interesting," says Porlier "There were also some rumours: 'Is Mystique Nightcrawler's mother? Why is Mystique that beautiful marine blue while he's that deeper indigo blue; how did that come about?' Those were some of the things that were brought up, but of course there were no good answers for them."

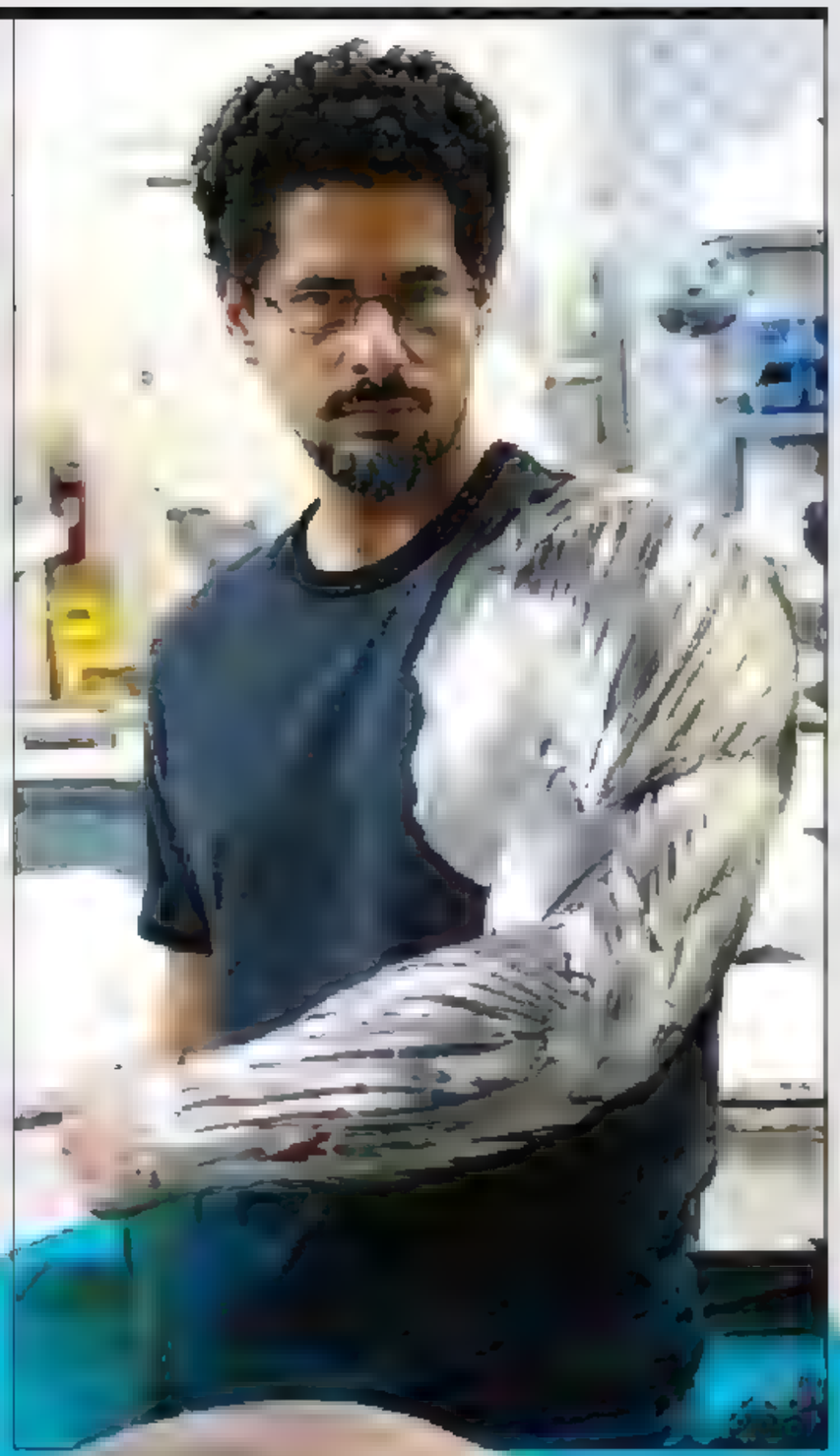
If Singer brought a strong visual sense to the *X-Men* franchise, that vision all but vanished when the director decided to helm *Superman Returns* instead of a third film. His original replacement for *X-Men: The Last Stand* was *Kick-Ass* director Matthew Vaughn, but it was an uneasy partnership to say the least.

"We really went with the comic books for reference," recalls Mike Elizalde, whose company Spectral Motion took over the make-up effects on *The Last Stand*. "With Beast, we came up with a design that everybody loved, and then Matthew came on board and had his own ideas. They were anything but iconic or faithful to the source material, so we started

TOP: Sculptor Ryan Peterson at work on an early Beast design

LEFT: Kelsey Grammar during a lifecasting at Spectral Motion.





going in a very different direction. Beast's hair became darker and he started looking less like a feral creature and more like a cat."

"He didn't know anything about the *X-Men*," continues Bart Mixon, who went on to co-apply the final Beast make-up on Kelsey Grammar. "Somebody gave him a graphic novel with the Beast in it, and it was the cat Beast, so to him, that was the Beast. But if you don't want that character don't give him that version when you're introducing him to the material!"

Jose tests the movement of a Colossus arm

A test for Deadpool from the *X-Men Origins Wolverine* film.

CREATIVE OVERLOAD

In the end, Vaughn decided to move on and director Brett Ratner was brought in just weeks before principle photography was scheduled to begin. Unlike the previous films, however, for which Singer had the overriding

"IT'S REALLY FRUSTRATING BECAUSE LOTS OF PEOPLE CONTRIBUTE THEIR IDEAS"

creative vision, there were now far too many cooks in the kitchen. In addition to Ratner, they included the film's other producers, Fox executives and Marvel bigwigs, all of whom seemed to have their own ideas about the way things should look.

"Trust me, when you're designing stuff for movies, it's really frustrating because there are a lot of people contributing their ideas," reflects

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ABOVE LEFT: Bart Mixon reapplies Vinnie Jones's Juggernaut make-up on set

ABOVE RIGHT: Lead artist Motoyoshi Hata sculpts a preliminary Juggernaut maquette

LEFT: Stunt performer Scott Adkins being turned into Deadpool

BELOW: Actor Daniel Cudmore in his Colossus wardrobe and appliances.

Norman Cabrera, who helped design and build Juggernaut for *The Last Stand*. "For whatever reasons, they really didn't want it to look like the comics, so they kept saying, 'We want it to look like the real world!' But what happened is all the fans started screaming that it didn't look like the comic books. It's hard to stay true to a character when there are so many people contributing ideas."

"Every background mutant should have been a recognisable character," Mixon says, "so that when the fans saw them they could say, 'Oh, look, it's Dead Girl' or whoever. They had this phone book-thick *X-Men* encyclopaedia with all these characters in it, so those were the extras we should have been doing I remember at one point they didn't want anything too far-out or weird, but if you've got a blue lady with scales, there was nothing we could do that was going to be anywhere near as wacky as that."

The *X-Men* franchise took a side trip with *X-Men Origins: Wolverine*, but there was no shortage of mutants, new or old. For the sequel/prequel, Alec Gillis and Tom Woodruff Jr at Amalgamated Dynamics Inc (ADI) took over the make-up effects. That included a set of bone claws for the younger Wolverine, for which the shop drew their inspiration from translucent rattlesnake teeth, to a subtler version of Victor Creed, aka Sabretooth, that featured tooth and nail extensions as well as a long fighting claw.

The company's biggest contributions to the film came in the form of Blob and Deadpool, and they created an 800-pound version of actor Kevin Durand for the former. The costume comprised a foam latex body suit with internal padding and weighted bags foam skin for the exposed arms and belly, and multiple face, head and neck appliances topped with a custom made wig.

For Wade Wilson, who is transformed into the monstrous Deadpool partway through the story, the ADI team found themselves running into difficulty in terms of a final approved design. "It was a creative yet difficult evolution," Gillis concedes, "because the iconic look of Deadpool was a challenge to adapt without compromise. Shooting had already commenced while the team continued to find the character, finally achieving a look that satisfied all involved just as Deadpool was to appear on camera.

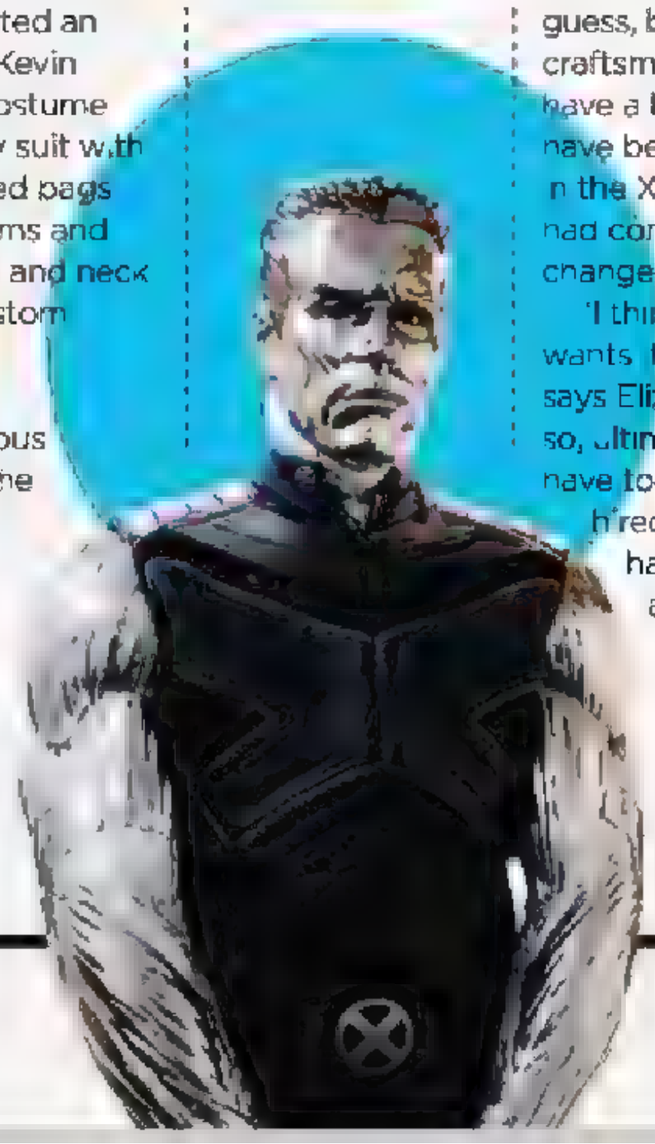
"The medically created version was highlighted by a bald head and mouth that had been surgically closed. The look was first established on stunt performer Scott Adkins and later refined once the team had taken a life cast of Ryan Reynolds. Retracted skin and sutures around the eyes completed the character in a nod to the comic book."

THE NEXT CHAPTER

Having peered into the past with *Wolverine*, it appears the next instalment will be another prequel with *X-Men: First Class* chronicling the formation of the original team. Matthew Vaughn will be returning to the fold, and the film is reportedly going to feature younger versions of the now-established main characters.

What they'll look like is anybody's guess, but the newest team of artists, craftsmen and technicians will certainly have a lot to live up to. "I think there have been some really radical changes in the X-Men," notes Mixon. "But they had competent people making those changes and they worked.

"I think that, in the end, everybody wants it to be a successful design," says Elizalde. "Nobody is against that so, ultimately, all of the people involved have to rely on the reason why they hired us in the first place. They have to understand that we're amassing a huge volume of talented people who have a lot of experience in the field. With the suggestions that make the most sense, we're going to come up with a really good design."



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COMIC ICONS

NO. 2

THE SANDMAN

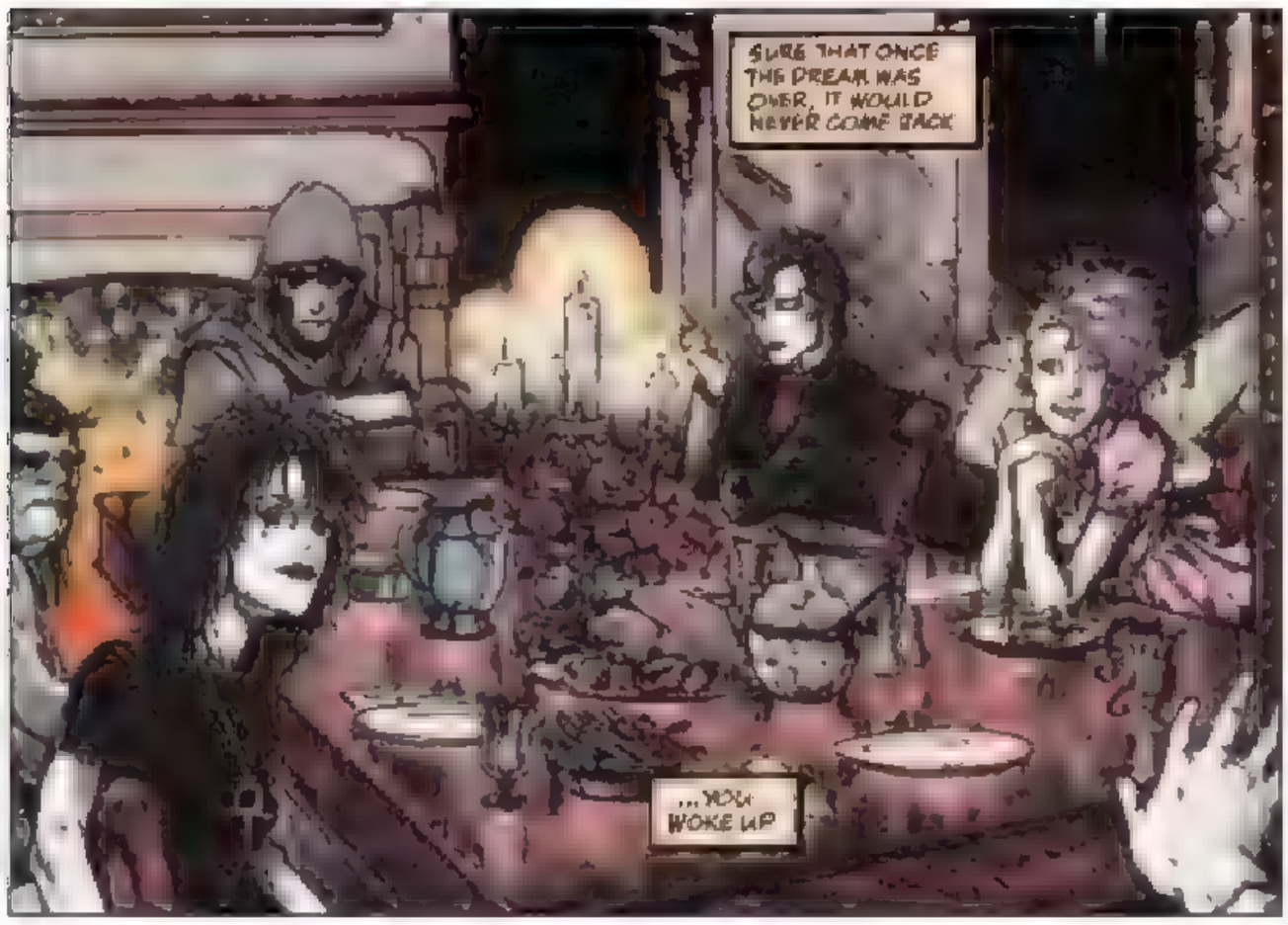
"HE IS A COMPLICATED CHARACTER, AND ONE WHOM THE READER DOES NOT WARM TO EASILY"

EXIT LIGHT ENTER NIGHT

The Sandman **could well be the single greatest self-contained story in comic books, which makes its awkward hero all the more remarkable. Chris Brosnahan celebrates Neil Gaiman's greatest creation...**

The Sandman started life as a horror series, advertised with the line "He will show you fear in a handful of dust." It almost immediately grew from this into a series that explored the nature of stories and dreams themselves.

This is the comic that made Neil Gaiman's name, and is still the work he's most associated with. His writing combines with a list of some of the greatest artists working in comics (Dave McKean, Sam Kieth, Jill Thompson, Michael Zulli, Chris Bachalo, Marc Hempel, Charles Vess, Malcolm Jones III, Glenn Fabry, Milo Manara and Frank Quitely among many more) to produce one of the most varied and interesting comic series ever written. Also worthy of note is the incredible job of lettering by Todd Klein.



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LEFT: The Endless say hello to Daniel, the 'new' Morpheus, during 'The Wake', *Sandman*'s final volume

There's no question about the comic's quality. It won Eisners in 1991-1993 for best series, and Gaiman won best writer from 1991-1994. Issue #19, 'Midsummer Night's Dream', won the World Fantasy Award for short fiction, the only time a comic has done so.

The series tells the story of Dream of the Endless, also known as Morpheus Oneiros, and many other names. He isn't just the lord of the dreamworld (known as the Dreaming). He is the embodiment of the concept of dreams. His family personify (in order of age) Destiny, Death, Dream, Destruction, Desire, Despair and Delirium. They're not gods. They're far more powerful than that.

SLEEP DISORDER

Dream is obsessed with his work, stand-offish, often rude, petty, self-important, pompous, lacking a sense of humour and vindictive. In fact, early on, we learn that he has condemned his former lover, Nada, to spending 10,000 years in Hell because she stopped loving him. He is a complicated character, and one whom the reader does not warm to easily. However, it's his attempts to better himself that define the series, and it is these very flaws that make Morpheus such a highly developed character

There is much to do in my kingdom. Much to replace. Much to create.
But time can wait...
I have found the palace I sought, though not in the way I imagined.
Front dungeon. I suspect a hospital of yellow grain...
I know the game we're in.
And I know it.
The sound of wings...

When we first meet Morpheus he is captured by the Crowley-esque magician Roderick Burgess, after he attempts to ensnare Death. He's kept captive for 70 years. So long, in fact, that Roderick's son Alexander inherits responsibility for Dream's capture. Once Dream escapes, he avenges himself upon his captor by giving him 'eternal waking', meaning that he's constantly dreaming that he's waking from a nightmare, only to find himself in another one. Dream then tracks down some of the distinctive tools of his trade – an insect-like helmet, his sand and a ruby containing his powers.

But the comic comes into its own after this story, when we begin to meet the rest of his family, and the series becomes a more relaxed, introspective affair, more properly reflecting Dream himself. And the Sandman really is inseparable from the series itself, being the personification of stories and dreams. This is despite the fact that, for large parts of some stories, he's a background presence, often only appearing as a marginal character in a single-issue story.

TOP LEFT: 'The Sound Of Her Wings' which introduced Death, is where *The Sandman* really took off

BOTTOM RIGHT: Death takes her younger brother on her daily rounds

Artwork that changes from story to story is entirely appropriate for *Sandman*, because Morpheus can look entirely different depending on who's looking at him. To the reader, he usually appears as a tall, pale man, dressed in black with pools of darkness full of stars instead of eyes. However, he also appears as a handsome African man in one story, as a far more Eastern-looking man in another, as an alien when he meets the Martian Manhunter, and – memorably – as a giant black cat in 'The Tale Of A Thousand Cats'. Despite the fact that Dream finds it difficult to change his personality and habits, his appearance is ever-shifting.

RESTLESS NIGHTS

This sense of constant change also means that the series is able to tell stories that have little to do with the title character, while being entirely

"ONCE DREAM ESCAPES, HE AVENGES HIMSELF UPON HIS CAPTOR BY GIVING HIM 'ETERNAL WAKING'"

WHAT THESE ARE THE LAST THAT I CONJURED TO
YOU LITTLE DEMONS YOU HEARD MY ORDER WHY ARE YOU NOT GONE FROM THIS PLACE?
DON'T ANSWER HIM, KETELS
I SAY WHAT I LIKE, SUMMON MY FETAL
WHY?
BECAUSE I DO NOT BELIEVE THAT THIS PATHETIC CREATURE IS TRULY OUR LORD LUCIFER
WOULD THE LORD OF HELL DESTROY HIS REALM?

about him as well. It also means that each story can be entirely different from the rest; some are overtly horror, some are fantasy, some are very personal, small stories, and others are broad comedy – the latter being most obviously displayed when an early story of the Endless involves them being portrayed as cute manga-style babies with oversized eyes.

At this point, it's necessary to mention something that would normally be considered to be a spoiler, although in this case it's more along

"WE GET TO KNOW DREAM EXTREMELY WELL, AND WE KNOW THE GREAT AND TERRIBLE THINGS HE'S CAPABLE OF"

the lines of describing *Hamlet* or *King Lear* as tragedies: Dream dies in the penultimate volume, 'The Kindly Ones'. While this is an enormous event in the series, it's also one which is given away in the introduction of the trade paperback, and even the fact that the following volume is called 'The Wake'.

The series is a tragedy. From the moment Dream is captured, he begins to put the pieces in place for his death, although he's unaware of what he's doing. What he needs to do throughout the series is change. However, as an immortal stuck in his ways, this is something he's inherently incapable of.

And this is really Gaiman's crowning achievement in the series – taking a character who is, in a lot of ways, dislikeable, and making it clear that he's a dignified, honourable being despite his many flaws. He achieves this in many subtle ways throughout the series. There is, at one point in 'Brief Lives', a six-page sequence in which Dream and

ABOVE 'Season Of Mists' sees Lucifer relinquish his rule of Hell, which causes a sorts of problems

LEFT Dave McKean provided every startling, stunning cover image for *The Sandman*

JUMPING-ON POINT

If you're a new reader, or if you're looking to get someone else into comics, *The Sandman* is a great introduction to the medium as being about more than superheroes. It has enough similarities to the superhero genre to appeal. Dream is immensely powerful, and the Endless could be likened to a mythical, apathetic and somewhat dysfunctional superteam like the Justice League Of America or the Avengers. It's also visually striking, as is Morpheus himself – all black hair and cloaks. Indeed, there are brief interactions with Batman, Superman and the Martian Manhunter.

However, reading it chronologically presents something of a problem. The first collection, 'Preludes And Nocturnes' is probably the weakest and the least accessible. Sam Kieth's art doesn't quite fit the series (he described himself as feeling like "Hendrix in The Beatles") and the rather more overt horror elements in the story don't do a great job of introducing the concepts that most fans enjoy. It's not that the series isn't good; it just hasn't found its feet yet, much like the first series of *Blackadder*. That said, the final issue, 'The Sound Of Her Wings', which introduces Dream's sister Death, is a corker.

So, if you're starting as a new reader, or if you're looking to buy a book for someone you think would like the series, we suggest starting with the fourth volume, 'Season Of Mists'. It provides an easy introduction to the larger myths behind the series, as it opens with a meeting of the Endless. It has a superb, high-concept story, in which Dream travels to Hell to combat Lucifer, only to be thrown completely when the Devil does something entirely unexpected. The work by multiple artists is a great way to get used to the series' revolving art duties, and there's some strong character work, not least since this is the story in which Dream most notably matures and softens.

It also features the concepts of 'order' and 'chaos' being represented by a cardboard box and an eight-year-old girl respectively, and a very drunk, very stupid Thor flirting with someone by explaining that his hammer gets bigger if someone rubs it. And who doesn't want to read that?

Most of the other volumes can be read in any order, except for 'Brief Lives', 'The Kindly Ones' and 'The Wake', which should really be read last, and in that order. These volumes are the climax of the series, and starting with them would mean missing out on a lot of references to previous stories.

SPIN-OFFS

As with most popular series, there have been a number of spin-offs from the *Sandman* comics. As is the nature of spin-offs, they're generally variable in quality, but there are some gems in there. Here are some of the best.

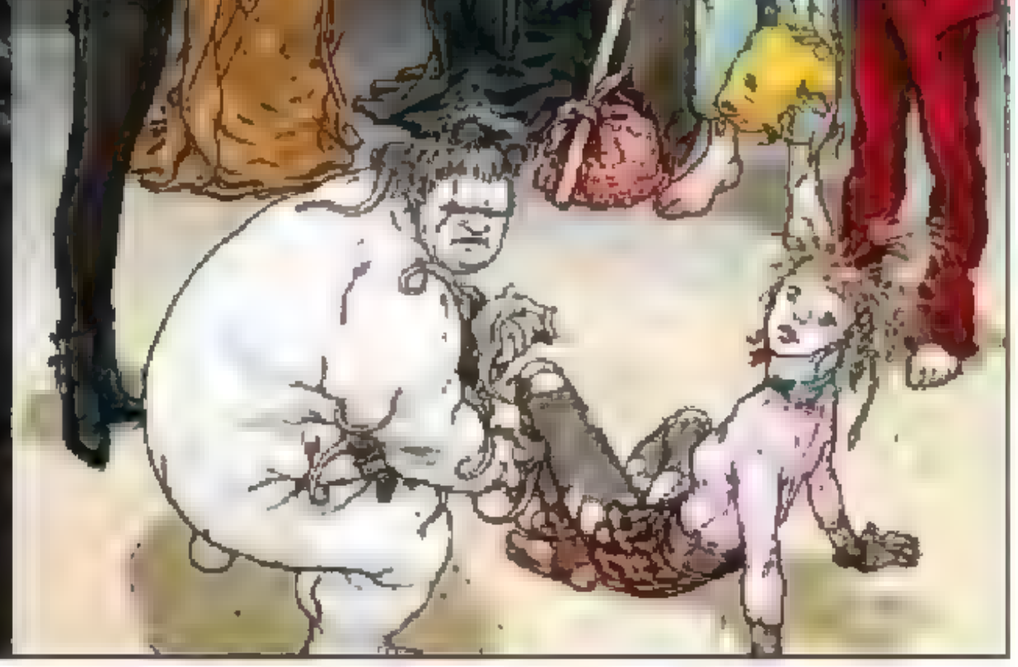
Endless Nights is a one-off graphic novel, with a short story about each of the Endless. Each story is illustrated by a different artist, and Gaiman has stated that the reason he wrote it was in order to work with the artists in question. While the most beautifully drawn story is European erotic artist Milo Manara's tale of Desire, the highlight of the book is Gaiman's collaboration with Barron Storey and Dave McKean, 'Fifteen Tales Of Despair'. The stories are flash-fiction, and some are genuinely haunting.

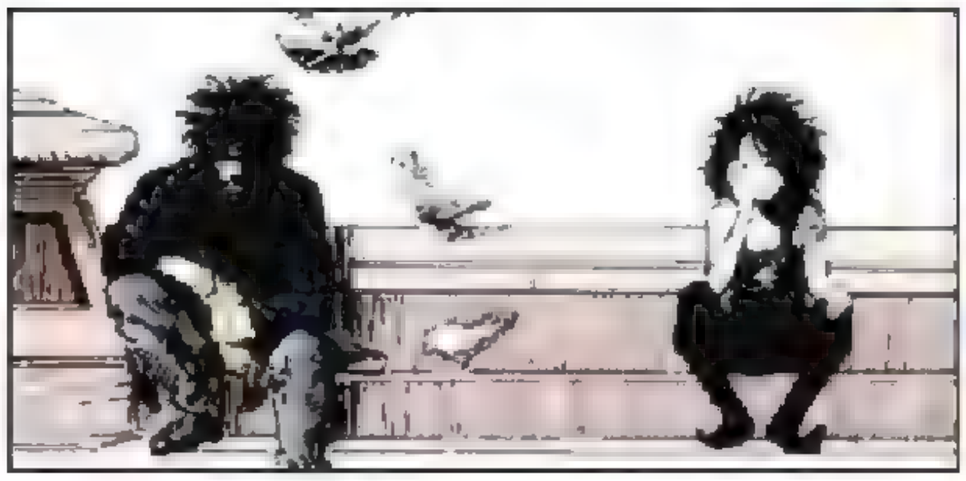
Death: The High Cost Of Living and *Death: The Time Of Your Life* are enormously entertaining stories about Dream's popular older sister. Death is one of the most fondly remembered characters in the series, and will have popped up in *Action Comics* to meet Lex Luthor by the time you read this.

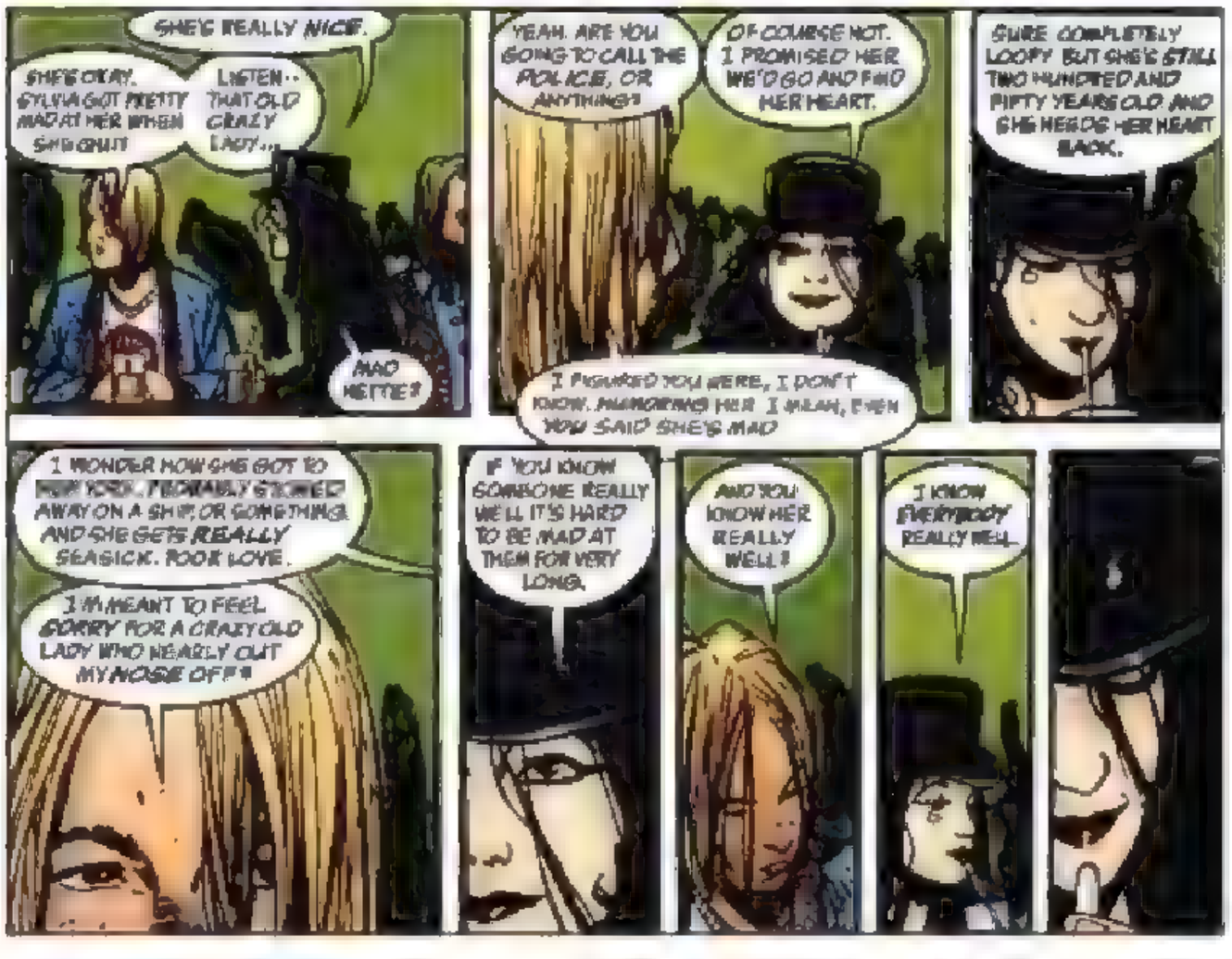
Mike Carey's *Lucifer* series features the fallen angel setting up his own universe in an attempt to find out how a universe with no worship would work. While it can be patchy in places, it's easily the strongest of the spin-off series. It ended up running to the same length as *The Sandman* itself, and can be enjoyed on its own merits. The regular artist, Peter Gross, now works with Carey on *The Unwritten*, which we gave five stars to in our last issue.

Sandman: The Dream Hunters is an illustrated prose story. If you're only interested in the larger *Sandman* plot, there probably isn't much to gain from this gentle tale of a fox falling in love with a monk. However, it's beautifully written and convinced a lot of people that Gaiman had used a genuine Japanese myth as his starting point. He didn't – it's entirely his own creation.

The Little Endless Storybook is probably the most fun spin-off. Jill Thompson has also used some of the Lil Endless in *The Dead Boy Detectives* and *At Death's Door*, but this short children's book best showcases her quirky artwork and sense for characters. It's also the closest thing we've had to a Delirium spin-off, and for anyone who's read 'Brief Lives' in particular, that's a 'can't miss' opportunity.






SHE'S REALLY NICE.
SHE'S OKAY. SYLVIA GOT PRETTY MAD AT HER WHEN SHE QUIT
LISTEN... THAT OLD CRAZY LADY...
MAD HETTIE?
YEAH. ARE YOU GOING TO CALL THE POLICE, OR ANYTHING?
OF COURSE NOT. I PROMISED HER WE'D GO AND FIND HER HEART.
SURE. COMPLETELY LOOPY. BUT SHE'S STILL TWO HUNDRED AND FIFTY YEARS OLD AND SHE NEEDS HER HEART BACK.
I FIGURED YOU WERE, I DON'T KNOW. HUMORING HER. I MEAN, EVEN YOU SAID SHE'S MAD
I WONDER HOW SHE GOT TO NEW YORK. PROBABLY STOWED AWAY ON A SHIP, OR SOMETHING. AND SHE GETS REALLY SEASICK. POOR LOVE.
I'M MEANT TO FEEL SORRY FOR A CRAZY OLD LADY WHO NEARLY CUT MY NOSE OFF?
IF YOU KNOW SOMEONE REALLY WELL IT'S HARD TO BE MAD AT THEM FOR VERY LONG.
AND YOU KNOW HER REALLY WELL?
I KNOW EVERYBODY REALLY WELL.

"THE SANDMAN'S INABILITY TO CHANGE MEANS THAT HE UNWITTINGLY SENDS HIMSELF TO OBLIVION"

Delirium wait for an appointment. And yet it's fascinating.

We get to know Dream extremely well, and we learn the great and terrible things he's capable of. We know how difficult he finds some of his actions, and how hard the consequences can hit him. We also know how genuine he is at all points. The Sandman may have his issues, but he's nevertheless entirely truthful and honourable. In fact, he's just as obsessed with his sense of honour as he is with his work. When he finally realises that condemning Nada for millennia was wrong, he travels down to Hell to free her, even though it will likely cause his death.

TOP LEFT: Dream and Death feed the pigeons. He's a grumpy old sod

TOP RIGHT: Death has starred in two terrific spin-off stories

Right from the start, as readers, we know where we stand with Dream. He may be vengeful, powerful and find it difficult to see why small humans should be of importance (other than as things that dream), but this is made clear from the first issue. We see him at his worst from the beginning, so the surprises in the series come when we see him at his best.

Since the most critically acclaimed issue of *The Sandman*, along with the final issue, both involve Shakespeare's deal with Morpheus, it's appropriate to come back to the Bard here. In Shakespearean tragedies, the hero is kept from greatness by his own inherent flaws, with Macbeth's greed, Hamlet's inability to act, and Lear's ego as examples. The Sandman's inability to change means that he unwittingly sends himself to oblivion, and is never able to achieve the potential he is so clearly capable of.

And thanks to Gaiman's writing, we care about him.

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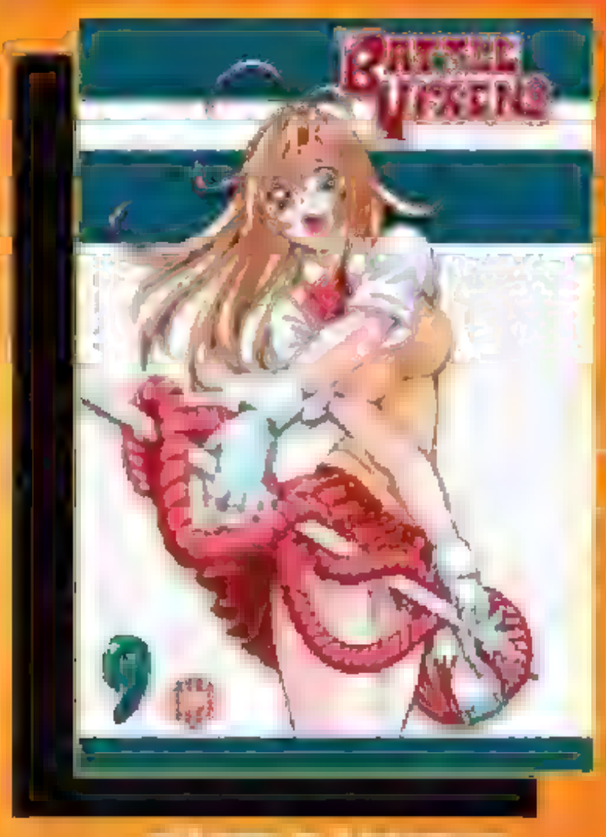

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SHAKESPEARE TO STARDUST

You might know him best for his work on *The Sandman*; here, artist Charles Vess looks back at his life in fantasy. By **Joe Nazzaro**

As writer Neil Gaiman recently pointed out, "The reason that Charles Vess draws such astonishing things, such beautiful things and such strange things so very well is simple. He draws what he sees."

Gaiman certainly knows whereof he speaks. His previous collaborations with Vess have earned all manner of accolades and their illustrated novel *Stardust* was recently adapted for the big screen (featuring a fearlessly camp performance by no less than Robert De Niro). When an animated version of the artwork from their new book *Instructions* was posted on the internet a few months ago by their publisher's marketing department, the footage quickly went viral.

All of this acclaim may be a bit too much for the self-effacing Virginia artist, who would generally prefer to let his work speak for itself. But, fortunately for his legion of fans, that's exactly what he's done thanks to *Drawing Down The Moon* (published by Dark Horse), a 35-year retrospective chronicling his career from early pre-art school work to his hugely ambitious current projects. Featuring more than 200 images, some previously unpublished, it's a revealing glimpse into the creative mind of Charles Vess.

While no fantasy fan worth his salt would have trouble recognizing a piece of Vess's artwork, that distinctive style took years to evolve. After studying fine arts at university, he returned to the 'real world' only to discover that his now-trademark sense of whimsical fantasy had been virtually eliminated. "I guess it had been stamped out by the fine arts community," he admits, "and it took a long time to get it back."

COMMERCIAL BREAK

"When I got out of college I worked for some friends who had a commercial animation studio, and in the downtime I would draw whatever I wanted to draw – just trying to develop a portfolio with this vague idea that I was going to go to New York and make it big.'

Fortunately, there were a few sympathetic ears (and eyes) when Vess moved to New York in 1976 and began hanging around The Studio, formed by fellow Virginian Mike Kaluta, as well as Bernie Wrightson, Barry Windsor Smith and Jeff Jones. All four artists had been juggling comics and fantasy art self-publishing, and were able to offer plenty of common sense advice to a young would-be illustrator. "There was lots of 'Watch out for this...' and 'Don't work for that publisher,' but also the aesthetic high of looking at their art and being inspired by it.

"Whenever I talk to younger artists I try to explain that it's maybe 50 per »

LEFT: 'Into The Green' cover art from *The Green Man: Tales From The Mythic Forest*.

BELOW: 'The Land Of Laughs'. Concept art for pitch meetings with studio executives to adapt the Jonathan Carroll novel.

cent your art, but [also] 50 per cent getting the job. You have to give a publisher, art director or editor some idea that you can do the job, because they're betting *their* job you'll do it."

Among the more unusual back-door assignments Vess landed during those early years was the opportunity to work on an illustrated version of *The Hobbit*. "They were using animation stills from an hour special that Rankin and Bass had done," he remembers, "but they had to cut out sections of the story for this hour animation."

HOBBIT-FORMING

"Abrams Books was printing the entire text of the story, so it needed 150 additional illustrations done in the style of the animation to fill out this illustrated edition. It found Walt Simonson, who started calling people he knew who liked fantasy and who he thought might be able to do this. I was one of them. We had to go in and show our work to the art director, who was a really nice man. After he asked for my quote, he just smiled and doubled everything because I'd asked for almost nothing.

"I ended up doing about 30 paintings; any painting with a barrel in it was mine, because the art director really liked my barrels. It wasn't the way I'd draw *The Hobbit*, but it was one of the first paying jobs I had in New York and quite a good portfolio piece."

Vess also began landing a number of comic book assignments, some of which were less than satisfying. "There were people who weren't very good artists, who had specific ideas about what they wanted on their covers, so if you drew anything that didn't look like what they thought they would have done, they had you redo it. There were any number of science fiction spaceship scenes that I gritted my teeth and got through."

© Subterranean Press

Even so, there were occasional assignments that transcended the material, such as a string of *Swamp Thing* covers that allowed Vess to play around with the DC Comics version of the Green Man archetype. "I never saw the actual comic book until after it was published," he points out. "Nancy Collins, who wrote those stories, would send me the script and I would look through it and try to find the coolest bit that had the best roots and twigs in it. And every once in a whole I would do a really goofy horror painting, with some eyes popping and flies buzzing around some dead meat.

"I did 13 *Swamp Thing* covers and 13 or 14 *Books Of Magic* covers, so it was a painting a month at DC for two or three years. It ate up a whole lot of time, which is why when Neil Gaiman and I finally started getting into the work on *Stardust*, I quit doing those covers, because I wanted to fall into the world of *Stardust*."

> "ONCE IN A WHILE I WOULD DO A REALLY GOOFY HORROR PAINTING WITH EYES POPPING AND FLIES BUZZING AROUND SOME DEAD MEAT"

ENTER SANDMAN

As it happened, the partnership with Gaiman became one of the most significant creative relationships that Vess has had to date. Their collaboration on the 'Midsummer Night's Dream' story in *Sandman #19* went on to win a World Fantasy Award (the first time a comic book had won; the rules were subsequently changed to prevent it from happening again) and became one of the most critically-acclaimed issues in the book's history.

Surprisingly enough," Vess recalls, "the *Spider-Man* graphic novel, *Spirits Of The Earth*, which I'd finished two years before, had been delayed and delayed, so the *Spider-Man* graphic novel and *Sandman #19* came out within months of each other, so it was a huge 'Look at me!' flag in the comic book retailer community, that really did change my life.

"Before that, I was doing work that was way off to the side that a lot of people liked, but that wasn't mass market per se. Once those two books came out, I was on more people's minds. One of the things that Neil told me, which I thought was pretty funny, was that there were a few objections at DC for me working on that issue, because they thought I was only a

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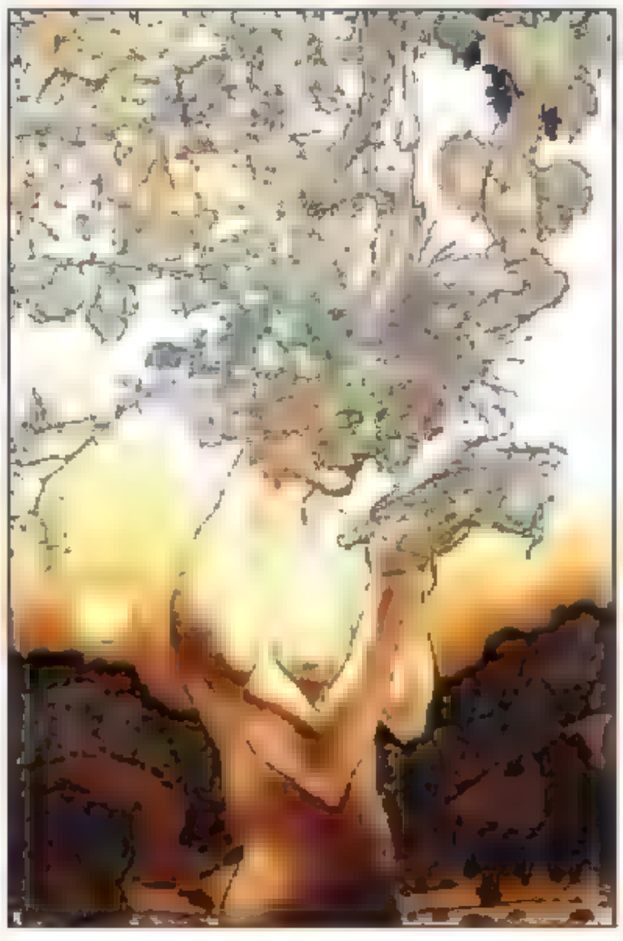


TOP: 'His Hand Was Black And Cold'. Cover art from the limited edition of *A Storm Of Swords, volume two*.

FAR LEFT: 'The False Knight On The Road'. Cover art from *Indy Magazine #15*.

LEFT: 'The Corn King'. Previously unpublished. The first of four seasonal Green Man images that Vess hopes to paint.

© DC Comics 2006

© Simon & Schuster 2005

superhero artist, because I'd worked on *Spider-Man* for so long.

"I'd previously illustrated an edition of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* that Neil had seen, so he called me with this idea for a different version and asked whether I'd be interested in reinterpreting the characters, which is always a fun thing. From the moment we started talking about it, our minds clicked. It's always better when you're working with a good writer – it pulls more out of you – and Neil is a very good collaborator. He's always thinking about you while he's writing the story, so your art is actually influencing where the story is going."

DUST IN THE WIND

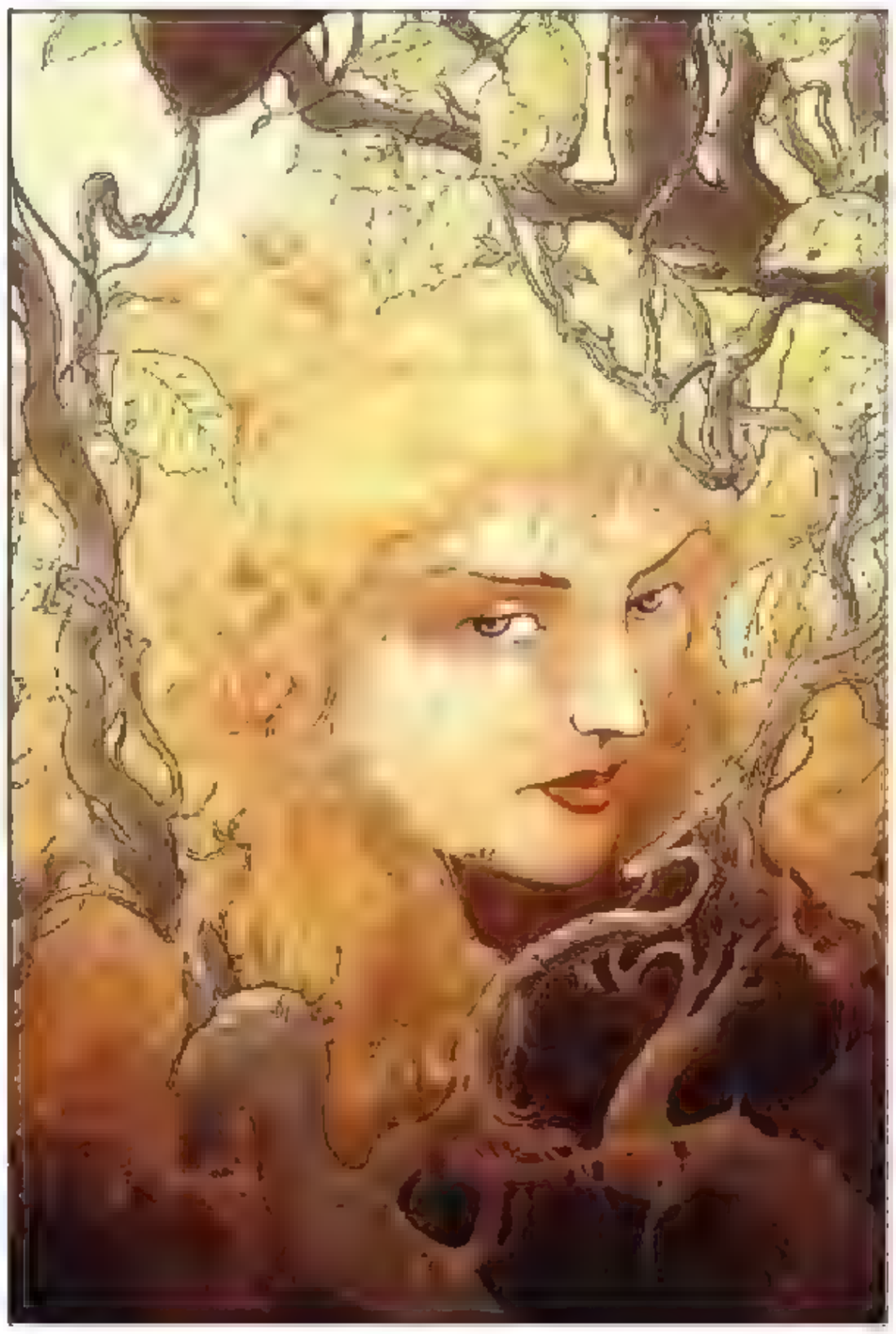
Gaiman and Vess later teamed up for the illustrated fantasy tale *Stardust*, which was originally published as a four-issue comic book in order to meet the demands of getting it done in time. The final version (recently re-published by DC/Vertigo as a deluxe edition) featured no fewer than 175 paintings created over a period of several years. *Stardust* remains one of Vess's most impressive pieces of work, along with his illustrations for George Martin's *A Storm of Swords*, which required 70 pen-and-ink drawings and six paintings. "It's always about the story," he insists when discussing his choice of large-scale assignments. "It was the same with *Rose* for Jeff Smith, which took the same amount of time as *A Storm Of Swords*. They both took about three years, while *Stardust* was spread out over a long time, but was still about three years.

"It has to be a good story that's totally entertaining and pulls you in – that is challenging to you. If it didn't do those things, it would be so amazingly

TOP LEFT: 'To The Water And The Wild'. Previously unpublished, inspired by Elizabeth Hand's novel, *Mortal Love*

TOP RIGHT: 'The Sultan's Bath' (with Michael Kaluta). Interior art from *Fables' 1001 Nights Of Snowfall*.

RIGHT: 'The Dark Of The Woods'. Cover art from the book of the same title



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hard to spend that amount of time on it and the work just wouldn't be good. To be surprised, entertained and challenged by a writer is the best thing an artist could have."

Over the past decade or two, Vess has continued to establish himself as one of the fantasy genre's preeminent artists, illustrating the work of such talents as Charles de Lint, Susanna Clarke and Tori Amos to name a few. He even embarked on his own brief foray into self-publishing in the mid-'90s, producing a series of comics based on classic ballads that were later collected together by Tor as *The Book Of Ballads*.

Looking back at the milestones in his career, the artist points to projects that propelled his work forward in terms of quality (and sometimes quantity), as being the most significant. "From an aesthetic viewpoint," he reflects, "there are times like when I started illustrating *A Midsummer Night's Dream* – I knew that I was drawing and thinking better and drawing more easily. It's really bizarre to sit at the drawing board and start drawing, and suddenly you're doing stuff that the year before, you would have to spend hours and hours trying to figure out how to do – and suddenly it's just coming out. There are all sorts of points during my artistic life when that's happened.

"Just recently, after spending three years on 'A Midsummer Play', the 16-foot bronze fountain I made, the last year of it was totally devoted to sculpting and pouring the bronze, and getting it all ready. The only drawing I did during that whole period was maybe some rough sketches with a ballpoint pen. When I finally got back to my drawing board and I was getting ready to draw, it made me a little nervous. But I sat down and suddenly started holding the pencil differently and I was drawing differently, and everything was easier."

INSTRUCTION MANUAL

In recent months, Vess has had no shortage of projects to keep him busy, including *Instructions*, his latest collaboration with Gaiman, which quickly rocketed up the *New York Times* best-seller list upon its release. "*Instructions* is a good example of what I was just talking about," notes Vess. "It took three years to do our previous book, *Blueberry Girl*, but it took just three months to draw and paint *Instructions*. *Blueberry Girl* did so well that they wanted another book right away so they said, 'Charles, can you get one done?' This was in March or April; by the first of June we had the layouts of this book. I drew and painted all summer and turned it in on 1 September. It's not something I could have physically done years earlier, so that was very exciting.

"I'm working on a book project with Charles de Lint, which is an expansion of an earlier children's book called *The Circle Of Cats*. He's expanding it by another 40-50,000 words and I'm putting in another 50 paintings, so it will eventually be at the level of *Stardust* as a book.

"I also have my own project called *The Greenwood*, which I'm writing and illustrating. I've pretty much finished the text and done a lot of the art for it, and it's making the rounds of the publishers even as we speak."

If Charles Vess has one piece of advice to offer young artists looking to follow in his footsteps, it could well be one of the lessons he's learned himself in recent years. "I think any artist should go outside their normal comfort zone," he insists, "and write or sculpt or paint or whatever it is they don't usually do. Then, when you come back, what you've learned from those experiences really informs your art and you become better as an artist. It's stretching your wings and your brain. As soon as you stop learning you're aesthetically dead, so you'd better keep on learning!"

ABOVE: 'Titania' Cover art from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

LEFT: 'A Passing Conversation'. Interior art from *The Charles Vess Sketchbook*

[illegible] Alison Gross, page 2 interior art from *Frank Frazetta Fantasy Illustrated #3*

"TO BE SURPRISED, ENTERTAINED AND CHALLENGED BY A WRITER IS THE BEST THING"

© Quantum Cat Entertainment

COMIC HEROES

ROGUES' GALLERY

Meet the art magicians who dispense their wisdom hereafter...

Brendan McCarthy
The influential McCarthy is known for *Rogan Gosh* and plenty of *2000 AD*.
Superpower Fruit manipulation

Dylan Teague
You'll see some of Dylan's spectacular *2000 AD* work on the following pages
Superpower The League of Teague

Boo Cook
Boo's credits include *Judge Dredd* and *ABC Warriors* for *2000 AD*, *Elephantmen* and *Murderland* for Image, and covers for Marvel
Superpower The Fear

Matteo Scalera
Matteo's first pro work was *Hyperkinetic* for Image in 2008. He's currently working on various *Deadpool* titles for Marvel.
Superpower The Right Elbow of Doom

Brandon Badeaux
Louisiana resident Badeaux has worked on plenty of *Star Wars* and *Superman*, some of which is on the following pages
Superpower Bulletproof earlobes

Andy Clarke
Andy's recent three-issue run on *Batman And Robin* was cracking.
Superpower The anti-guff

Matt Timson
Among others, Matt's work includes *The Darkness* and *Impaler*
Superpower The Socks of Forever

Chris Weston
Chris has done *Judge Dredd*, *The Filth*, *The Invisibles*, *Ministry Of Space*, *Fantastic Four: First Family*... and is trying to complete *The Twelve* before he dies
Superpower Clouds the minds of hens

Mike Perkins
Mike writes a regular column for *Comic Heroes*, of course, and is the artist on Stephen King's *The Stand* from Marvel.
Superpower Ultimate Gentleman

Brian Ching
Another *Star Wars* alumnus, Brian's latest work includes *Iron Man*
Superpower Reverse swimming

John Higgins
A true veteran; we've got a not-so-secret crush on his gloriously atmospheric art for *Hellblazer*, *Haunted*.
Superpower Vorpal fingers

Dave Gibbons
The legendary Mr G's credits include *Watchmen*, *The Originals*, *Give Me Liberty*, *Doctor Who* and loads for *2000 AD*
Superpower Infernal puppetry

Mark Buckingham
Eisner Award-winning artist on Vertigo's *Fables*. For much of the last 20 years he has been a regular of DC's Vertigo line on titles such as *Hellblazer*, *Sandman* and *Shade The Changing Man*.
Superpower Ironic vertigo

COMIC HEROES PRESS

Volume 3 Autumn 2010 How To...

HOW TO... DRAW FOR COMICS

The writers have had their say, now it's time for the artists to have theirs...

By Rob Williams

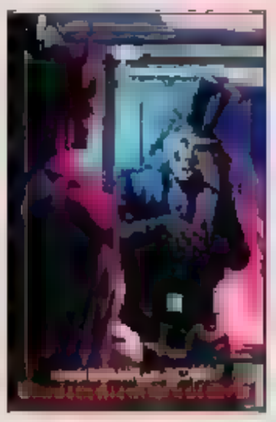
Comics are, first and foremost, a visual medium, which leads us to a school of thought whereby artists are the most important people in comics. (Of course without a story to visualise in the first place, there's nothing to draw, offers the comic writer behind this feature series in a blatant show of ironic bias.)

Comic artists are certainly the instant sell of a comic book. The script could be ordinary, but we'd all buy books by Adam Hughes and Brian Bolland regard ess – whereas a great script will see its comic remain unbought on the shop shelf if the art is a train wreck. The sheer breadth of a comic artist's skills far outweighs those of the writer. If a comic were a movie, the writer would deliver the script and suggest the visuals, but the artist would be the director, the actors, the cinematographer, the costume and production designer, the lighting engineer and the location scout. The best comic artists do all this *and* deliver an astonishing level of storytelling. It's a detailed, obsessive, scarily time-consuming job, but these people build worlds all of their own.

In the first two issues of *Comic Heroes*, we talked to some of the leading writers in the comics industry and asked them for their tales of getting their foot in the door, gaining work and structuring their writing. Now it's the artists' turn. You want to be a comic artist? You want your original art to sell for thousands in Mike Mignola style and have people queuing out of the door for your sketching sessions? Well, here's where you start learning in sweat! ['80s *Fame* reference that shows the writer's age – Ed] But remember, while the life of a Jim Lee may seem glamorous, there's a price to be paid, and that price comes in the form of long, often thankless, hours spent hunched over a drawing board. »

HOW DID YOU GET YOUR FIRST BREAK INTO COMICS AND GET PUBLISHED PROFESSIONALLY?

The myriad routes into the industry revealed. You might get some ideas here.



Dylan Teague (*Judge Dredd, Jonah Hex*): I started sending samples to *2000 AD* and Marvel UK when I was about 19. Steve MacManus (then *2000 AD* editor) used to send me back really helpful critiques of my stuff and gave me David Roach's phone number and suggested I give him a ring. He lived pretty close by and shared a studio with another Cardiff-based artist, Mike Collins. I started going to their studio regularly and actually managed to blag it so that I got on a business start-up scheme while I was there. This was a real help as I got to see professionals at work. Steve MacManus then passed on my details to David Bishop, who was about to start *Judge Dredd: Lawman Of The Future*. It was a new *Dredd* mag to coincide with the movie. Anyway, they sent me a sample script for me to do a couple of tryout pages and not long after I got my first professional job – *The Fatty Olympics*!

Andy Clarke (*Batman & Robin, R.E.B.E.L.S.*): I knew this guy called Kek - I had no idea at the time that he was a writer and it just came up in conversation with a mutual friend that he had written stuff for *2000 AD*. So I got talking to Kek about things, how I was thinking about trying to submit some samples and, after seeing a few examples, he said he'd let the editor – David Bishop at the time – know that I'd be sending some stuff to him. After that, David was very patient with me and let me have some trial scripts to get my storytelling together. After a few of these, David hooked me up with my first commission – a four-part *Sinister Dexter* strip.

ABOVE: A bit of Andy Clarke *Batman* 'Mmm'

ABOVE RIGHT: Brandon Badeaux's *Star Wars* work

LEFT: John Higgins's *Jonah Hex*

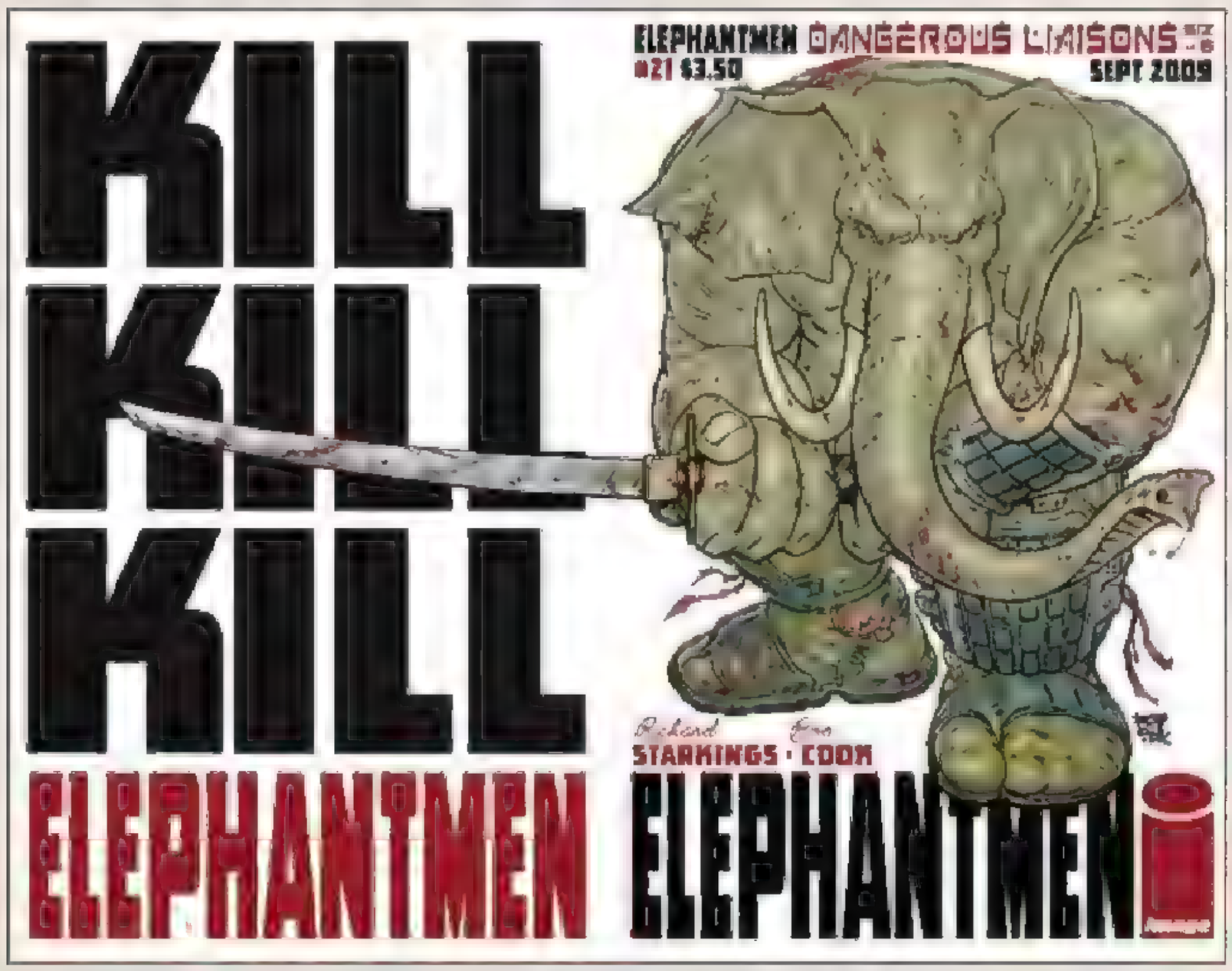
OPPOSITE: Dylan Teague's classic take on *Judge Dredd*.

Boo Cook (*Judge Anderson, Elephantmen*): My first comics work was unpaid and self-published, and came from replying to an artist wanted advert in the back of *Comics International*. A writer, Ben Dickson, was searching for someone to fill art duties on his *Planet Realtime* comic and had put out an advert. Although it was unpaid, the lessons I learned doing those 30 pages really prepared me for my first paid gig in *2000 AD*. The best way to learn and to advance and hone down your style is simply to rack up those pages and get as many under your belt as you possibly can

Matteo Scalera (*Deadpool, Dynamo 5*): My first professional experience in comics was in 2007. A friend of mine here in Italy was in contact with an American writer (Howard Shum), who was searching for an artist to start working on a new sci-fi/action four-issue series for Image Comics. I sent him some stuff and he dug it, so we decided to work on it. After some months, the first issue of *Hyperkinetic* was out!

Brandon Badeaux (*Star Wars, Superman*): While attending Savannah College of Art and Design I was given an interview with Bob Schreck at DC, who immediately asked why I wasn't working already. When he returned after his trip, he showed my portfolio at a DC editorial meeting to demonstrate what the talent pool at SCAD looked

NO GRAFFITI



like. I find it easiest to make copies of my work in small 8.5x11" binders – just a little plastic book with laminated pages. They're small and much easier to flip through than a giant portfolio and, if you do meet someone who is interested in your work but can't give you a job right away, you can just hand it off and let them have it. That being said, I was also what they call 'pleasantly persistent', shooting emails to remind Bob not to forget that he liked my work.

Chris Weston (*The Filth, Ministry Of Space*): I studied for a year with Don Lawrence, artist on *Storm* and *The Trigan Empire*. He then introduced me to his agent, Pat Kellener, who got me work on *2000 AD*.

Mike Perkins (*Captain America, The Stand*): I have a couple of stories about this, actually. My first – and official – break came about when I met up with Patrick Ke leher of Temple Rogers Artists Agents down in a pub in London (you'll find that most comic artists' anecdotes start with, "I was in this pub..."). I'd booked an appointment with him and he looked through my portfolio and gave me some constructive criticism – suggesting I meet up with him again in six months. I did, and he was so surprised that not only had I listened to him but that I had also taken his suggestions to heart – young artists are renowned for thinking they know it all! He asked to take my portfolio with him and meet up the following day. When we did so, he slid a three-page *Future Shock* across the table. The previous day, he had been to *2000 AD* with my work and picked up the script right there and then.

My other tale involves my first work at Marvel UK; I had a friend who had sent some of his script work in to Marvel. There was no joy for him at that time, but they did ask, "Who drew the illustrations on the back of the letter?"

Brian Ching (*Star Wars, Iron Man*): I started off as a background artist at both Extreme Studios and Top Cow. They were both in the Los Angeles area and I was a relatively local guy, so they took a chance on me. It was a great way to learn how things worked – to see the thinking process for each artist was pretty important. I can't remember the first time my name appeared in a comic, but it was probably with one of those places.

John Higgins (*Watchmen, Razorjack*): That's a simple question but it has no simple answer – it's a case of the '10-year overnight success story', as it is for most of the pros in comics. But the very first professional published work I ever got was a cover for *2000 AD*.

But I also continued to hold a day job, which meant I could pay the bills, for some years after that.

Dave Gibbons (*Watchmen*, *Rogue Trooper*): I made contact with Dez Skinn, who at the time was sub-editor on *Buster* at Fleetway, and also on *Fantasy Advertiser*. So I went to see Dez with the intention of getting some fan art published, and that was my first work, professionally. But an agent eventually saw what I'd been doing in *Fantasy Advertiser* and thought he could get some work for me. He did, but it was a little bit of a fa se start, real.y. I didn't really make any money; I had to go back to work at my previous job and then Dez tipped me off that one of his artists, Joe Colquhoun, was off on holiday and they needed a ghost, so I did something in Joe's style and was abie to get a six-week gig After that, I had enough money in the bank that I thought I could probably make a go of it. The first comic work I ever got paid for was a page of lettering in a comic called *Corl!*. I got paid £2.50 for it and it was so bad that it was almost the end of my career there and then.

Brendan McCarthy (*Judge Dredd*, *Rogan Gosh*): After doing some work on a UK indy – *Sometime Stories* – I sent my work in to *2000 AD* and starting working on *Judge Dredd* for them.

Matt Timson (*Impaler*, *The Darkness*): When I was younger, I thought that I wanted to draw comics (and even

OPPOSITE TOP: Mike Perk ns s take on Kid Miracleman

OPPOSITE LEFT: Boo Cook draws a cracking elephant Nice.

ABOVE: Some stage-by-stage work from Matt Timson

ABOVE RIGHT: Dave Gibbons s classic *Watchmen* artwork

did a stint at the London Cartoon Centre), but I quickly realised that I'd never be the kind of comic book artist that I wanted to be without some kind of leg-up, so I went into illustration instead. But then the digital revolution arrived, and there I had my leg-up. All of the things that had previously made drawing comics beyond me were suddenly within grasping distance of my sweaty paw once again.

Anyway... I'd drawn several small press scripts. John Reppion and Leah Moore saw them and asked f I was interested in doing some creator-owned work with them on a book called *Deadeye*. We ended up doing two instalments for Image's *Popgun* anthology. Then, on the back of *Deadeye*, and completely out of the blue, Rob Levin at Top Cow got in touch and asked if I was interested in drawing *Impaler* for them. Init'ally, I wasn't sure that I was. Not because I wasn't interested in the concept, but because the thought of drawing 120 pages was daunting for me when the longest strip I'd ever drawn was only eight pages long. I just had this morbid fear of being completely and utterly out of my depth.

In the end, however, I decided that I was in a position that a lot of people would sell their own grandmother to be in – and that not giving it a go because I was too scared would be far too feeb e for words

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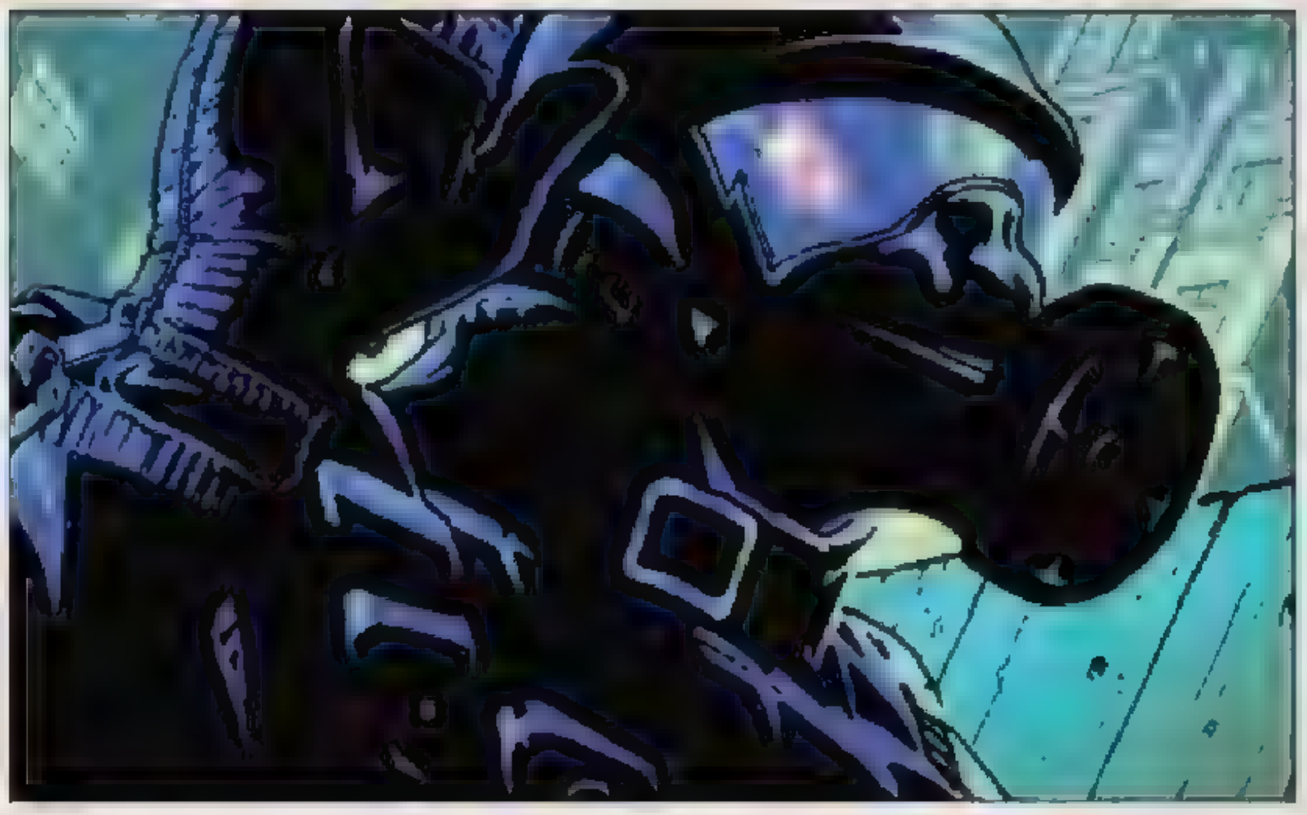
YOU'RE A YOUNG ARTIST WITH YOUR PORTFOLIO IN HAND AT YOUR FIRST CONVENTION, AND YOU'RE SEEKING WORK. WHAT SHOULD BE IN SAID PORTFOLIO?

£50 notes, photographs of the editor leaving their mistress's flat at 3am, fine examples of your art? What to choose...

Brendan McCarthy: Pages of comics – not just pin-ups. Let's see the narrative and storytelling chops.

Dylan Teague: Be ruthless, just include your very best work and make sure that it's all finished. It's a so he pful to tailor your portfolio to the relevant publisher – editors like to see that you can draw their characters. Sequential pages are essential, as pinups don't really tell the editor whether you can cut it or not Secondly, shut up and listen. Don't try to counter every criticism the editor leves at your stuff; just stand there and take it. Most of the time it ll be true, anyway.

Boo Cook: The main thing you'll hear on this subject is, 'Editors don't want to see pin-ups, they want to see sequential art'. This is true, of course – but if you have a real kick-ass full-page image that you know has the wow factor, definitely stick it in. A really important thing is to try to tailor your portfolio uniquely to the editor you're visiting. It's no good turning up at a *2000 AD* portfolio review with pictures of Superman – editors want to see how you handle their characters, so use your head.



ABOVE: Some Higgins detail from *The Hills*

ABOVE RIGHT: A little more Higgins – this time, detail from *Razorjack*

OPPOSITE LEFT Brandon Badeaux's take on *Gears Of War*.

John Higgins: Make sure you include an A4 contact sheet – including your name and address – to hand out with small examples of your work and to leave with the editor

Matteo Scalera: First of all: a few works, not 80 pages. I think 10-15 pages are enough. During conventions, editors take a look at *tons* of stuff, so I think it's best to avoid bothering them with endless portfolios. If you have some cool stuff in there, a good editor will notice it after two or three seconds. I'd also include pencils, not just inked works, and try to have a most the same style in all of the stuff you show. You could be great at managing different styles, but editors prefer artists with a very strong and solid style.

Brandon Badeaux: In terms of what order to put your pieces in, the human brain typically only really remembers first and last – depending on how bright the person is. So you need a strong open and close, as well as something nice in the middle. Last is always best in art to me, because that's the flavour that you leave someone with. Think of yourself as a magician or a comedian: people really only remember the end of a trick or the punchline of a joke – the set-up is designed to fall by the wayside of the mind.

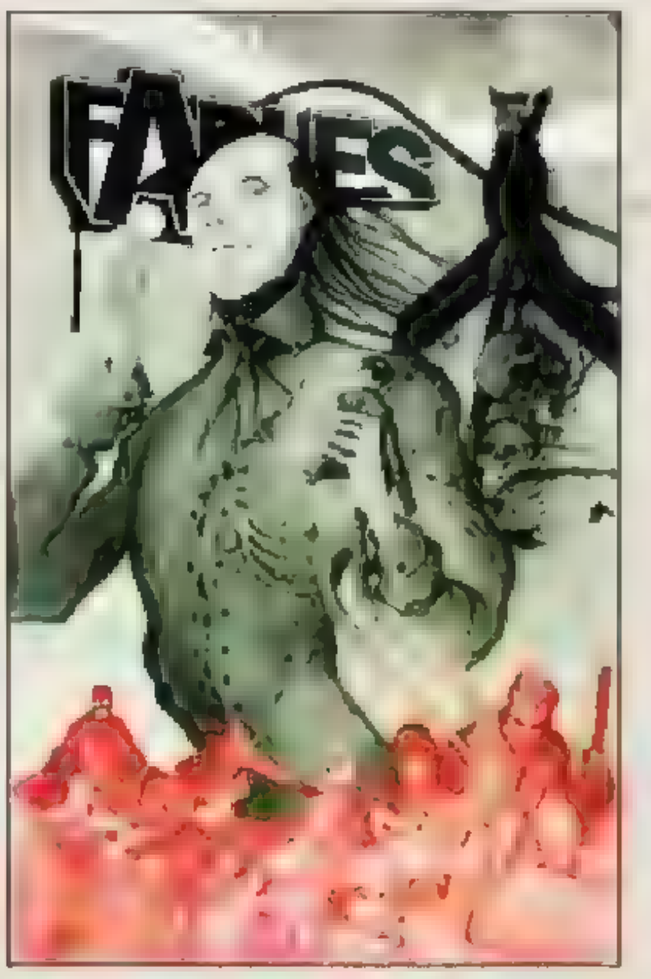
Mike Perkins: Bring things that are appropriate to the reviewer – sure, you can show *Batman* pages to any comic editor, but don't bring the abstract artsy-fartsy thing you love. Also, bring

a receptive attitude. It sounds simple but, if you want to be a penciller, show your pencils. If your desire is to become an inker, show your inks next to a photocopy of the pencils – preferably someone else's pencils. If you want to be both, make sure that your pencils are shown, too.

Mark Buckingham (*Fables*, *Miracleman*): First off, don't bring a bloody great A3 or A2 folder full of loose bits of original art. The best thing to do is to bring good quality prints or photostats reduced to publication size, ideally in an A4 presentation book with plastic sleeves. That way, the editor you're approaching can flick through the work easily, and it's simple to move things around and replace art as you produce more. It's important to show editors work in a format that's easy to handle and close to comic proportions – that way they can make a quicker assessment of your ability and will find it easier to imagine your work in print.

Brian Ching: Everyone practices the big stuff. Batman standing on a gargoyle in Gotham City, Spider-Man swinging from skyscraper to skyscraper in New York – every portfolio already has these. But editors also want to see if you can you do the quiet scene. The coffee shop scene of MJ Watson crying in the corner of a Starbucks; an employee offering her a muffin while kids in the background are fighting over a stuffed animal; customers waiting impatiently in line to give their order. Basically, the ability to show real people in real-world situations. After that you, can bring out the big guns and have the Green Goblin and Spidey come crashing through the window and tearing each other apart!

Dave Gibbons: The time you're likely to spend with an editor is brief. A good



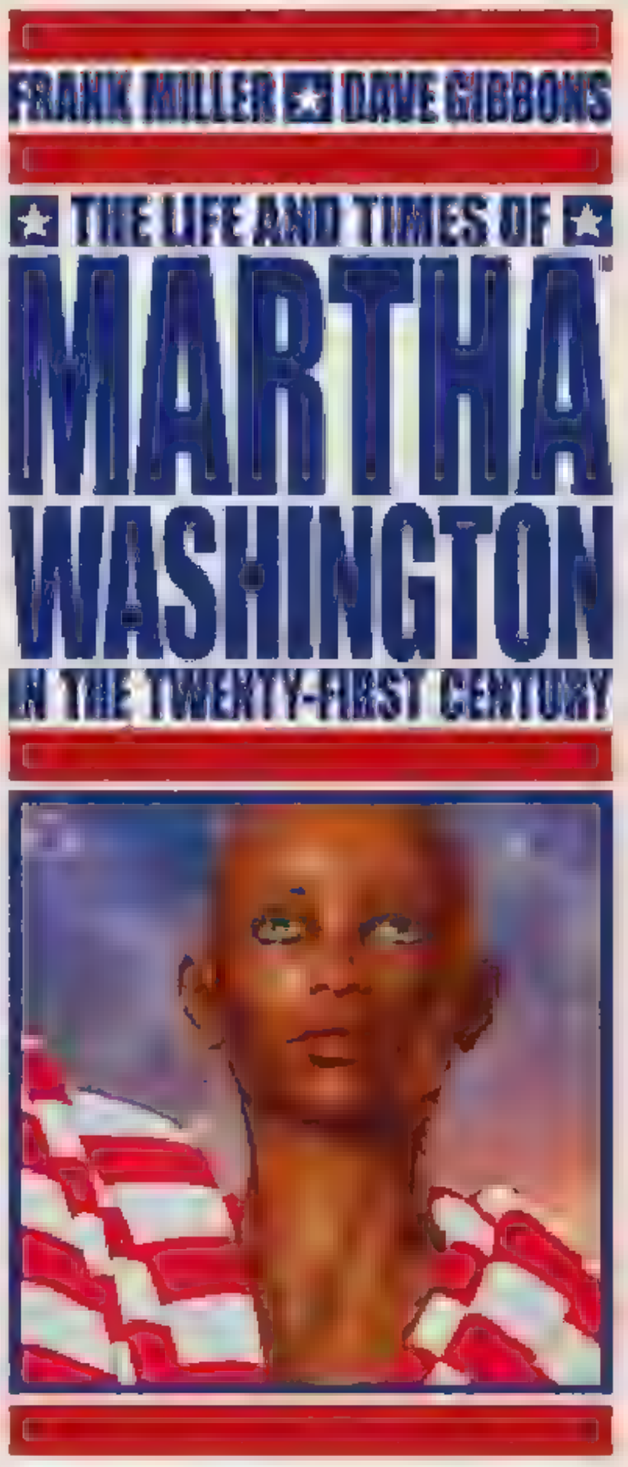
editor can discern very, very quickly if you can draw or not. If he thinks you're of a professional standard, he'll probably take your name down. If he thinks you're not quite good enough, he'll probably give you some pointers on how to get to a professional level. If you really aren't good enough, hopefully he'll be frank and tell you so. I always try to be very honest with people when they show me their work; it's ridiculous to give false hope to people. Having said that, you see a lot of really fantastic artwork and think, 'This guy's never going to make it because it's too easy and too good and he'll get bored'. Someone who's not quite as good but is persistent stands a better chance of working professionally. Comics are all about persistence – doing pages week after week, month after month – so if you persist and there's evidence of it, you may well be successful.

Chris Weston: Include your most recent and best work. It's pointless showing people your work while making pathetic excuses for it. All too often, you hear an aspiring artist say, "Oh, don't look at that one. I did it six months ago and I had the flu at the time". You're making it easy to reject you.

Edit your portfolio ruthlessly before you show it off to prospective customers. It's far, far better to turn up with a portfolio containing only five pieces, all of which are excellent, than a portfolio of 50, of which *only* five are excellent.

While it's essential to only have work you're proud of in your portfolio, accept the fact that others may not share your opinion. They're probably more experienced, knowledgeable and powerful than you, so its pointless throwing a hissy fit and complaining about the very comments you've invited. Suppress your rage, contemplate their suggestions and start again. Don't moan about it on forums: that will only piss people off.

Don't cram your 'folio with your versions of big-name characters like Batman, Wolverine or Judge Dredd. It's highly unlikely you're going to be given a crack at these flagpole characters until you've spent a good few years as a professional and have already proven yourself. It's far better to turn up with images of minor characters, as that will give editors a better idea of exactly where to slot you into their schedules. It's very hard to do a better Dredd than Boland, MacMahon or Ezquerra.. however, if you turn up with a spectacular take on Sinister Dexter, Bix Barton or Bad Company you may just give Tharg some good ideas. Originality combined with quality has a double-whammy effect.



OPPOSITE TOP: A mighty Marvel mash-up from Mike Perkins

OPPOSITE FAR LEFT: Dylan Teague zips up for *2000 AD*

OPPOSITE LEFT: A Mark Buckingham *Fables* cover

TOP: Details from the Teague/Williams *Dredd* tale *Meat*.

ABOVE: More classic Gibbons – this time, *Doctor Who*!

TOOLS OF THE TRADE: PENCILS, PENS, BRUSHES, PAPER, CINTIQ, ETC. TIME TO GET TECHNICAL: WHAT DO YOU USE TO MAKE A PAGE?

Writers just need Microsoft Word or Final Draft. For artists, the means of creating their material are almost infinitely variable, especially in the digital age. Our contributors are all superb comic artists, but no two of them seems to use the same tools – as you'll discover below. One of the most wonderful, often overlooked, things about comics is that you may have two world-class artists, but neither's work will look like the other's.

Dave Gibbons: Traditionally, people would use Bristol board, which is a thick card with a smooth, durable surface, because it's going to have to withstand handling and corrections. They draw on it in pencil first, probably with a blue pencil – a Col-erase pencil is a really good blue pencil. The thing about blue pencils is that they drop out when you scan or Xerox the page; that's why it's usually used. Col-erase are also erasable.

On top of that you probably pencil with a regular graphite, wooden pencil. The grade you use is up to you. A lot of people use HB, but some – myself included – use H because it's harder and less messy. And as for brushes and pens, there's a whole range of dip pens. Brandauer make good pens – they're my favourites at the moment. Pens really aren't as good as they used to be – I know this sounds like an old man talking, but the metal's not as resilient as in the old days, so a lot of people try to get hold of vintage pens, which are worth paying a premium for. The same goes for brushes. Windsor Newton series 7 no. 3, 2 or 1 watercolour brushes are the tools of choice, but they're very expensive and only maybe one in three actually works properly, so a lot of people have turned to using markers. Really it's just a question of trying what you like and seeing what works for you. Also, these days, because you're going to scan it into the computer, you don't have to draw on durable board.

In terms of digital media, you need a pressure-sensitive drawing tablet.

ABOVE RIGHT: Brandon Badeaux's Locust from *Gears Of War*. Nice fellas.

BELOW: Art from Dave Gibbons's original graphic novel, *The Originals*.

Wacom is generally recognised as making the best ones, and the best of its range is the Cintiq, which comes in a couple of sizes. I've got the 21UX, which, when you revolve it to portrait orientation, is almost exactly the same size as the drawing area on a traditional piece of pre-ruled comic book drawing Bristol board.

As for software to use with it, Adobe Photoshop and Illustrator are good general-purpose art packages. My personal favourite is Manga Studio. The 4 EX version has all the bells, whistles and perspective tools, as well as a wonderful variety of inking tools and panel dividers. It also does a cheaper version of the program called Manga Studio Debut, which you might want to try out for size. But the 21UX Cintiq running Manga Studio 4 EX is my weapon of choice.

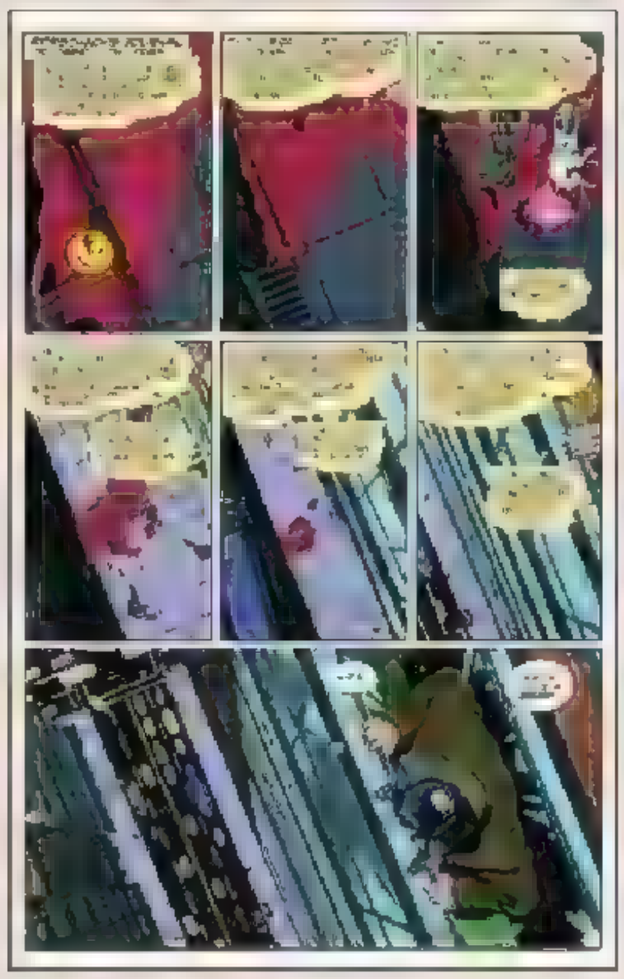
Brendan McCarthy: I still like to do the black and white on paper, then scan it into the computer to do all the whizz-bang stuff.

Dylan Teague: I like to start penciling using blue Col-erase pencils, then use an HB to tighten up. For inking, I mainly use Scharff 3000 no. 2 sable brush and Hunt 102 nibs. I use markers for straight lines and tech stuff.

In terms of paper, I really like Strathmore 400 Bristol board. You can't get it in the UK; it has to be ordered over the internet. It's amazing paper, though, and worth the cost.

I use the computer a *lot*. Manga Studio is brilliant for comics – I even do a little bit of inking in it now, but mainly I use it for the rough stage of the page. Photoshop is also massively important to me nowadays – I use it for all of my colouring and scanning. I use a Cintiq 12WX, but I'm hoping to one day upgrade to the 21UX.

Boo Cook: Some artists get a tool or a technique and stick with that forever and some, like myself, simply use whichever tool feels right for the job. Before I begin an image or strip, I try to visualise the finished product in my



head and work out which method feels the most comfortable to achieve it. For example, if it's a big, bold, clear image, I'll consider using acrylic paints and really try to give it some oomph. The same approach would be less favourable for a highly detailed cityscape – for that I would probably go for line work and computer colouring, as it's easier to manipulate and juggle all of the factors such as texture and lighting. Sometimes, if the job requires a really dirty grungy feel, I'll just use pencil and work into it with my trusty 8B solid graphite stick. These days I've gone full circle and use 49p biros to do some of my inking – a tool that I used ten years ago at the start of my published career but ditched because I didn't think it was professional enough! Basically, just feel comfortable with your medium.

Matteo Scalera: I use an HB technical pencil for the layouts and pencils phase; I then use a Kolinsky sable brush (Windsor & Newton or Raphael) size 0, 1 and 3, a nib with various tips and some Staedtler technical pens (size 0.05, 01, 02 and 08), and I use black Speedball India ink. I like Marvel artboards, because they're pretty rough and this helps having some cool 'dirty' effects with inks. In general, I prefer to work on rough paper, but if I need to draw something more cleanly, I use some technical design paper. I'm not a huge fan of the all digital stuff, though – I prefer using my computer just for coloring. I use a Wacom Intuos A4 Wide.

Brandon Badeaux: I tend to use a drafting pencil, since no one inks my work but me any more. Nothing can get as sharp as that, though – if you fall in love with tiny lines, you really can't ink them with this tool, so it's very much best suited to a penciller who doesn't particularly need to use ink. When I do ink, though, I use Photoshop to put a punctuation mark on a piece, and greyscale the work before adding highlights and shadowing.

TOP LEFT: A page from a little comic called *Watchmen*.

ABOVE RIGHT: More *Meat* from Mr Teague.

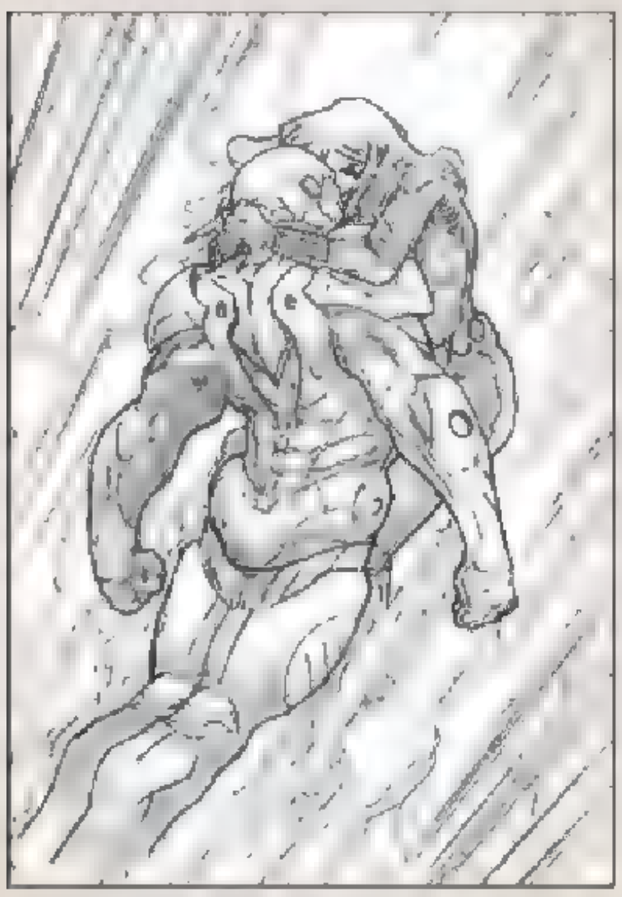
ABOVE: A bit of in-progress *Hulk* from Brandon Badeaux.

Andy Clarke: It took me a long time to settle on the tools I use now – probably too long, as I spent a lot of time fussing about. I think I flitted between different pens and the like with almost every job – thinking there was something out there that was better than what I was currently using. This wasn't really true, and I think it slowed my development quite a bit. Eventually, I settled on mechanical pencils for the drawing (2H in particular, as it cuts down on the dirt and smudge that you get with softer grades) and Rotring Rapidographs for inking – sizes 0.13 to 0.70 to get the necessary contrasts in line thickness. For filling blacks, I just use Edding 400s and 500s. As for the paper itself, I've pretty much always used smooth Bristol board.

John Higgins: I think a Wacom digital tablet is a valid way of making comic pages, but I am traditional. I start the finished pencils in non-repro blue pencil, which means I don't have to rub any lines out once I finish with the inks.

Once the inks are done, I scan it into the computer, colour in Photoshop, and send to the publisher.

Mike Perkins: I'll pencil using a 2H Staedtler Lumograph – I tried technical pencils once but couldn't get any character to the line. I'll then go straight in with my #1 Raphael brush and Windsor & Newton ink. I pretty much use a #1 for all the linework, hopping to a #4 for the big black blocks of ink. When utilising greytone, I use pencil, black Conte pencil and paper burnisher, ink wash and gray jet pens.



ABOVE: More from friend of *Comic Heroes* Mike Perkins

LEFT: Brian Ching's version of *Iron Man*

RIGHT: More punished flesh from John Higgins's *The Hills*

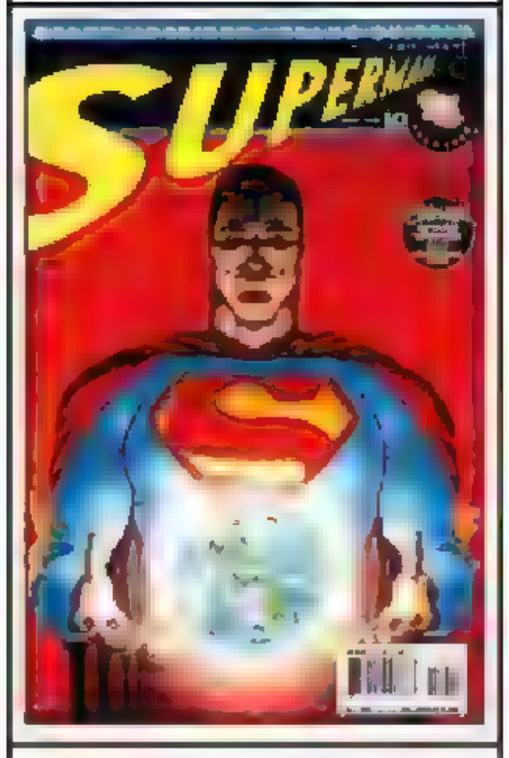
Mark Buckingham: I pencil with a regular HB pencil. For inking, I prefer a brush – a Windsor and Newton Series 7 no. 3, to be precise – and I use Rotring or Higgins inks. More recently, I've also taken to using Faber-Castell Pitt artist pens for some inking, too. These are particularly useful for work when travelling or at conventions. My painted work is mostly done with watercolours, which I also use for grey tone washes.

Brian Ching: I'm pretty low-tech, I use traditional stuff – pencils and paper I use a Koh-I-Noor lead holder and H leads for the layout. It's a larger lead, which means that it covers the area more quickly. I alternate between that and Alvin Mechanical .3mm and .5mm pencils, which I also use with an H lead. For me, the H lead doesn't smudge too much – and so that makes it easier for the inker to see what's going on. For erasers, I use a Tuff Stuff eraser stick, Sakura electric eraser, and basic kneaded eraser. That's pretty much it; I work in a very old school way, compared to a lot of other people.

Matt Timson: All digital. I work in Painter and Photoshop with a Cintiq 21UX. I've always worked with these two programs in tandem, and started out with an A5 Wacom Graphire tablet, before upgrading to an Intuos A4 and then moving on to the Cintiq last year. I love working digitally, and I really struggle with traditional media now. I think that it can make you lazy, but the trade-off (for me, at least) is greater creativity. I'll try things digitally that I wouldn't have the time or patience for with real paint. I've also dabbled with Manga Studio – which produces some lovely lines – but you can't swap files between it and Photoshop in the same way that you can when you're using Painter, which severely limits its appeal for me.

Chris Weston: I just use crappy old felt-tips. For some reason, I work quicker with a pen than I do with a brush and an inkpot. However, I think the original art looks better when done with a brush and indian ink. There's a quality of line and a richness you can't duplicate with a felt-tip. CH

COMIC
CLUB



EXPLORING THE
MUST-READ CLASSICS
OF COMICDOM

WHAT YOU THOUGHT...

Morr son and Qu tely can do no wrong with e ther Superman or Batman in my opinion. Also, manag ng to combine the slightly camp bonkers stuff of the '50s and '60s with the modern Superman legend so flawlessly s impress ve. The Lee and Kirby for a new generation, anybody?
Terry Rat Pappy Wells

The best American superhero comic ever. You could give that run to anybody – man, woman or child – and not only would they know who everybody was, they'd understand what was going on, too. Morrison absolutely na is Superman in this book, and Quitely's art is a joy to behold.
Rad Kerrigan

Much like they d d with *New X-Men* Morrison and Qu te y show how fresh com cs can be when they're re- ntroduced to their core concepts. Beautiful work from both creators.
Mike Perkins

This is Superman turned up to 11. Some of Morrison's finest writ ng accompanied by beautifu artwork from Quitely and Jamie Grant. It's rea ly super man.
Craig Mitchell

Some of it is just madness, really, showcasing Grant Morrison's weird imagination. But unlike, say, *The Invisibles*, it doesn't disappear up its own arse and confuse the Hell out of you. It really takes care to focus on the characters inside the lunacy, and Frank Quitely's art is just completely out-of-th s world.
Jerry Ryman

GET INVOLVED

Do you want to be part of Comic Club? Then let us know your comments by ema ling us at **comic.heroes@futurenet.com** or going to our Facebook page at **www.facebook.com/ComicHeroes**

ALL-STAR SUPERMAN

GRANT MORRISON AND FRANK QUITELY 2005

Twelve brilliant issues that completely define the Man of Steel and his world, says Jes Bickham...

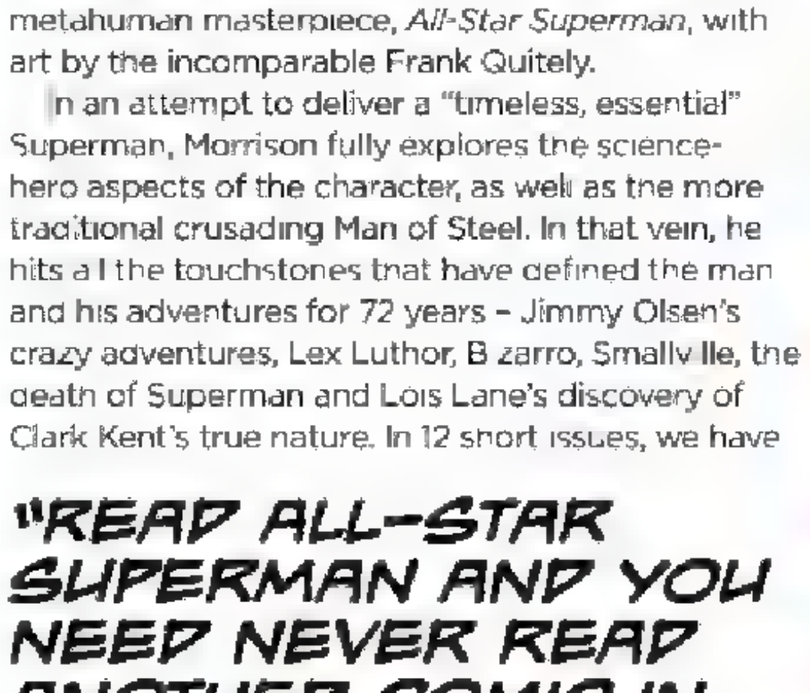
Grant Morrison has long been regarded as comics' out-there ideas man. H's own creations, such as *The Invisibles* and *The Filth*, are unique, mind-bending slices of weirdness, but over the last decade, he's really taken pains to apply his boundless imagination to superheroes. Witness his sterling run on Marvel's *New X-Men*, his ongoing *Batman And Robin* and what might be his metahuman masterpiece, *All-Star Superman*, with art by the incomparable Frank Quitely.

In an attempt to deliver a "timeless, essential" Superman, Morrison fully explores the science-hero aspects of the character, as well as the more traditional crusading Man of Steel. In that vein, he hits a l the touchstones that have defined the man and his adventures for 72 years – Jimmy Olsen's crazy adventures, Lex Luthor, B zarro, Smallv lle, the death of Superman and Lois Lane's discovery of Clark Kent's true nature. In 12 short issues, we have a complete portrait of Superman, his world, friends and enemies, presented in hyperreal form and colour by Quitely.

Make no mistake – it's strange. But Morrison roots everything in common humanity and never lets the cosmic nature of his hero overrule the beating heart beneath. For all its mind-expanding oddness, this is as universal a Superman tale as you could want. Read *All-Star Superman* and you need never read another comic starring the Man of Steel.

Alongside Warren Ellis's *Planetary*, it's a potent reminder that superhero comics can sometimes be as inventive, sophisticated, intel.gent, entnralling and moving as they should be. CH

> **"READ ALL-STAR SUPERMAN AND YOU NEED NEVER READ ANOTHER COMIC IN THE FRANCHISE"**



NEXT ISSUE: WARREN ELLIS AND JOHN CASSADAY'S *PLANETARY*

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COMIC REVIEWS

P114

SCOTT PILGRIM

RATINGS EXPLAINED

Every *Comic Heroes* review is scored out of five stars. Here's what each rating means...

BRILLIANT	★★★★★
GOOD	★★★★
AVERAGE	★★★
PRETTY POOR	★★
RUBBISH!	★

THIS ISSUE!

Batman: Under The Red Hood	p123
Kick-Ass	p117
Marvel cartoons	p123
Scott Pilgrim	p114
18 Days	p115
A Sickness In The Family	p[illegible]
ABC Warriors: The Volgan War	p[illegible]
Brightest Day	p[illegible]
Day of the Deal	p[illegible]
DC Comics poster book	p[illegible]
Death's Head Volume 1	p[illegible]
Fear Agent	p[illegible]
FVZA	p[illegible]
Judge Dredd Case Files 16	p[illegible]
Judge Dredd Tour of Duty: Backlash	p11[illegible]
Marvel Super Heroes 4D	p[illegible]
SelfMadeHero round-up	p[illegible]
Shadowland	p[illegible]
Superman	p[illegible]
Wonder Woman	p[illegible]
X-Men: Second Coming	p[illegible]

SCOTT PILGRIM VS THE WORLD

MOVIE REVIEW!

12A/112 mins

DIRECTOR: Edgar Wright

WRITERS: Michael Bacall, Edgar Wright

CAST: Michael Cera, Mary Elizabeth Winstead, Kieran Culkin, Ellen Wong, Alison Pill, Mark Webber, Anna Kendrick, Chris Evans, Jason Schwartzman, Brandon Routh

OUT: NOW!

★★★★☆

Scott Pilgrim first appeared in 2004, in the black-and-white graphic novel *Scott Pilgrim's Precious Little Life* by Canadian Bryan Lee O'Malley. The series ended in volume six, *Scott Pilgrim's Finest Hour*, in July 2010, by which point Edgar Wright's feature adaptation was poised for release. So there's a clear divergence between the two – never mind the fact that it would have been impossible to squeeze six graphic novels into a single 112-minute film. Despite this, Wright has nailed the comic's tone, while also exploiting all the possibilities of bringing it to life on the big screen.

Scott (Michael Cera) is a 22-year-old Toronto slacker who plays the bass in three-piece band Sex Bob-omb. He's dating high schooler Knives Chau (Ellen Wong) when he meets the girl of his dreams – literally, because she's already appeared in his subconscious. This is Ramona Flowers (Mary Elizabeth Winstead), who's relocated from New York. The pair start dating, but there's not only the issue of the jealous Knives – there's also the fact that to win Ramona's heart, Scott first has to fight her seven evil exes.

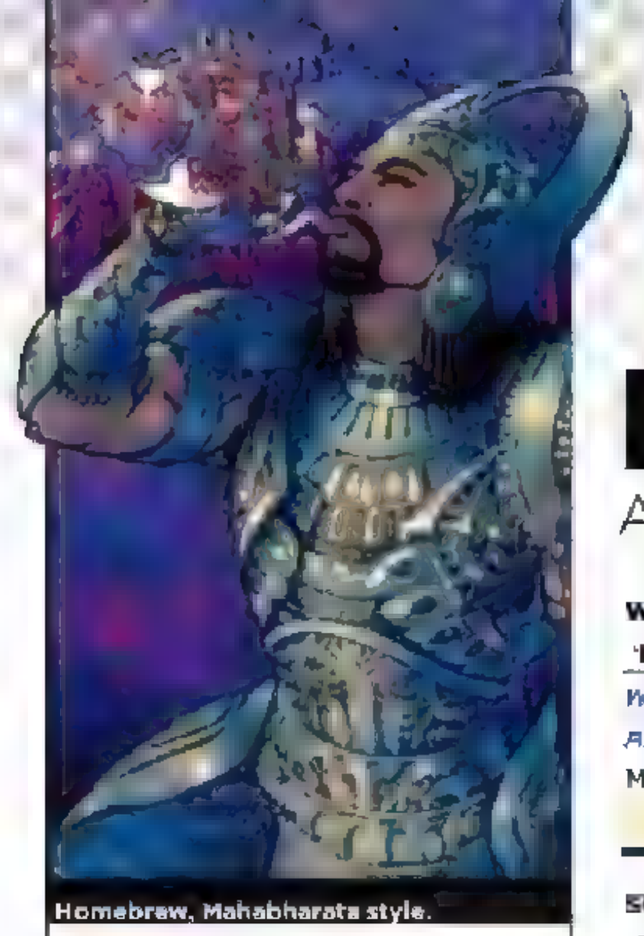
In many ways, *Scott Pilgrim Vs The World* is Wright's closest film to his breakthrough TV series, the much-loved *Spaced*. Both feature twenty-somethings inhabiting a world that's part dork, part cool, and both are rich in oddball social dynamics and quality banter. Notable here are Scott's relationships with his gay flatmate (Kieran Culkin) and with his band-mates, particularly deadpan drummer Kim Pine (Alison Pill). And both productions are packed with Wright's trademark tight editing, comic scene-changes and clever visual puns.

Of course, Wright's been honing his filmmaking technique through *Shaun* and *Hot Fuzz*, but here he has the added benefit of clicking with O'Malley's highly inventive source material. The comics are packed with pop culture nods (such as the name of Scott's band for starters, right Mario fans?), which Wright utilises superbly. So Scott's fights play out like videogame duels, combined with comical wire-fu and feisty visual effects. Speaking of the fights, there's some great casting for the exes too, with Chris Evans and Brandon Routh getting to subvert their prior superheroics by both playing egotistical sods.

The Scott character is also somewhat egotistical (albeit endearingly so), which should give Cera a chance to escape his 'nice geek' typecasting (see *Superbad*, *Juno*, *Nick And Norah's Infinite Playlist*, *Youth In Revolt* etc). Sadly, although he's reliable with the humour, can handle a bass and is novel for the fighting, Cera doesn't bring much extra to the role. Indeed, his casting and that of Winstead may be among the film's few questionable areas, because the pair have barely any chemistry – which kinda ruins the notion that Scott's getting into all these crazy scraps because he's falling in love with her. Thankfully the whole thing is so fun and snappy, it easily survives this single shortcoming.

Daniel Etherington

Fight scenes have a fun videogame feel.



Homebrew, Mahabharata style.

18 DAYS

Indian legend blasted into the future

WRITER: Grant Morrison
ARTIST: Mukesh Singh
PUBLISHER: Liquid Comics/Dynamite 184 pages
OUT: NOW!

Not actually a graphic novel, *18 Days* is an illustrated collection of Grant Morrison's original pitch, character profiles and scripts for the first three episodes of last year's abortive webisode series. It's hard to read this lavish tome and not wonder what might have happened if the financial woes of Richard Branson's Virgin Comics hadn't scuppered the cutting-edge animation

Morrison's notes provide a fascinating insight into the thinking process of one of comics' most imaginative visionaries, detailing the creation of what he describes as "a psychedelic *Lord Of The Rings* for the 21st century". But rather than setting it in some mythical fantasy realm, Morrison's adaptation of the classic Indian legend the Mahabharata takes place in a timeless sci-fi landscape, where the cataclysmic 18 Days War is fought with the help of advanced technology.

But as brilliant as Morrison's ideas are, the real revelation is artist Mukesh Singh whose sketches and storyboards are included in the book. His intricate, highly detailed, often double-page paintings bring to mind Chris Achilleos and Chris Foss's classic '70s work. This will surely not be the last we see of *18 Days* because Hollywood producers should be hammering down Morrison and Singh's doors after seeing this dazzling volume
Stephen Jewell

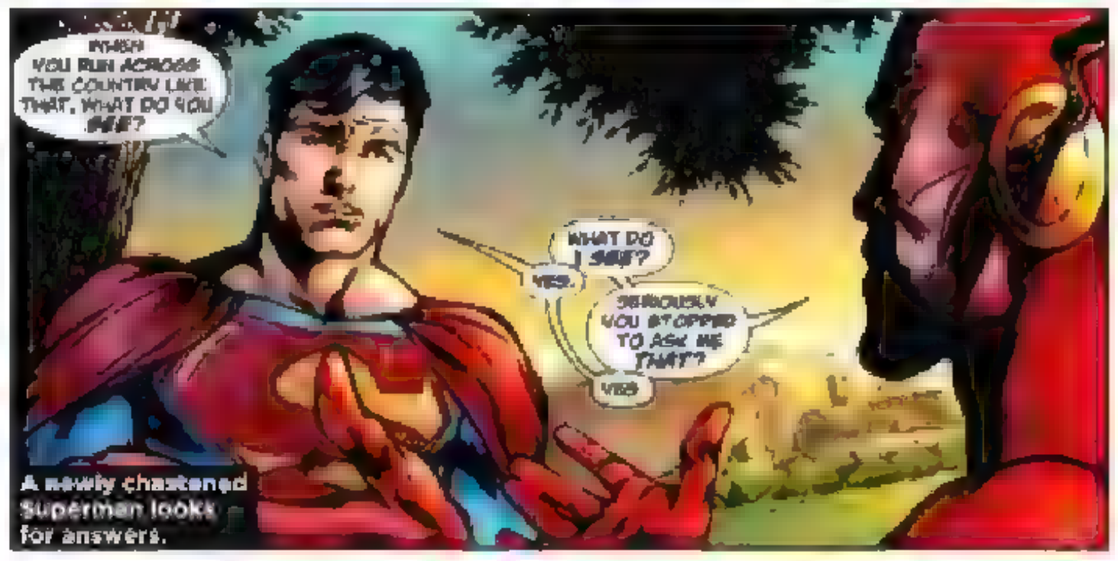
DC ROUND UP

A new dawn for Wonder Woman, and Superman takes a stroll...

WONDER WOMAN
'Past Imperfect, Present Tense'
WRITER: J. Michael Straczynski
ARTIST: Don Kramer (inked by Michael Babinski)

SUPERMAN
'Grounded'
WRITER: J Michael Straczynski
ARTIST: Eddie Barrows (inked by JP Mayer)

BRIGHTEST DAY
WRITERS: Geoff Johns and Peter Tomasi
ARTISTS: Ivan Reis, Patrick Gleason, Ardian Syaf, Scott Clark and Joe Prado (inked by Vicente Cifuentes, David Beaty and Mark Irwin)

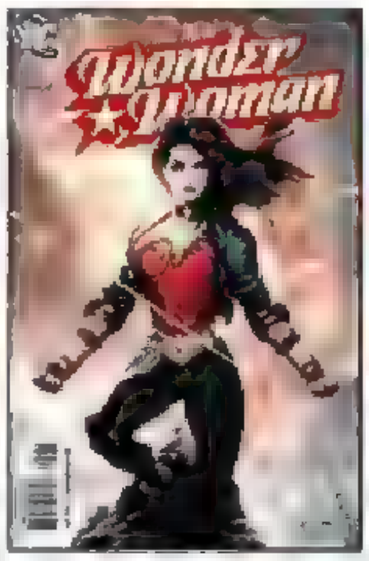

WHEN YOU RUN ACROSS THE COUNTRY LIKE THAT, WHAT DO YOU SEE?
WHAT DO I SEE?
YES.
SERIOUSLY YOU STOPPED TO ASK ME THAT?
YES
A newly chastened Superman looks for answers.

In the closing pages of issue 600, Wonder Woman turns a corner and everything changes. Suddenly, she's younger, living in New York and is one of the few surviving Amazons following the destruction of Paradise Island. Diana must not only piece together the truth about her past, but also her own powers, almost all of which are denied to her. To make matters even worse, the same force that destroyed Paradise Island is still hunting the survivors... It's a brave choice and Straczynski's writing gives the character a different, less confident edge than before.

Meanwhile, in the aftermath of the disastrous New Krypton war, Superman is accused of having lost touch with humanity and, inspired by this, begins a year-long walk across America to try to reconnect with the people under his protection. The end result is a surprisingly effective, gentle story that sees Superman playing basketball, cleaning a restaurant and discovering a group of alien scientists living in hiding. This combination of the mundane and the fantastic looks to be the story's major selling point and, based on the issues published so far, it has a lot of potential. This is Superman with the emphasis on 'man' and there's something surprisingly mellow about the storytelling that's the perfect follow up to the worlds-spanning spectacle of the 'New Krypton' saga.

Finally, *Brightest Day*, the weekly follow-up to *Blackest Night*, picks up where the previous series left off. The dead heroes and villains possessed by the Black Lantern rings find themselves returned to life as, outside Silver City, New Mexico, the White Lantern begins to communicate with them. The entity within the White Lantern has watched over Earth throughout history and is dying. Now a successor must be chosen, and each resurrected hero and villain has a role to play in that choice. Meanwhile, the Martian Manhunter realises that another Martian may be loose on Earth, Aquaman discovers that what he did as a Black Lantern will not easily be forgiven, and Jason Rusch and Ronnie Raymond, the two halves of Firestorm, realise that someone else is in their shared mind.

Brightest Day's character-driven stories and the ongoing central mystery help to give the series a welcome shape and direction and, unlike some previous DC weekly series, there's a real sense of purpose to it. If you're interested in the current state of the DC Universe then all three of these books are great places to start.
Alasdair Stuart



MARVEL ROUND-UP

A new hope for the X-Men, and Daredevil goes over to the dark side...

X-MEN: SECOND COMING

WRITERS: Matt Fraction, Mike Carey, Zeb Wells, Craig Kyle, Christopher Yost

ARTISTS: David Finch, Terry Dodson, Greg Land, Ibraim Roberson, Mike Choi

PUBLISHER: Marvel

OUT: **NOW!**

SHADOWLAND

WRITER: Andy Diggle

ARTIST: Billy Tan (inked by Matt Banning)

PUBLISHER: Marvel

OUT: **NOW!**

★ ★ ★ ☆

After Asgard came crashing down to Earth earlier this year in *Siege*, this summer's Marvel crossovers have been smaller affairs, contained within their respective characters' books.

Like 2007's *Messiah Complex*, which introduced Hope, the first X-baby born into a world decimated of mutants by the Scarlet Witch after *House Of M*, *Second Coming* has been spread throughout the X-line, which isn't great value if you only purchase flagship books *Uncanny* and *Legacy*, and not lesser titles such as *X-Force* and *New Mutants*.

Kicking off strongly at Easter with a David Finch-illustrated one-shot, the story begins with the now teenage messiah Hope and her protector Cable returning to the present day, where they're hunted by mutie-haters such as Bastion and William Stryker. With shades of Stephen King's *Under The Dome*, it culminates with the X-Men trapped in a sealed-off San Francisco, where Sentinels attack them on all fronts. Unfortunately, although it has its moments, the story was stretched too thin over its three-month course and the much-publicised deaths of Nightcrawler and Cable felt disappointingly anti-climatic.

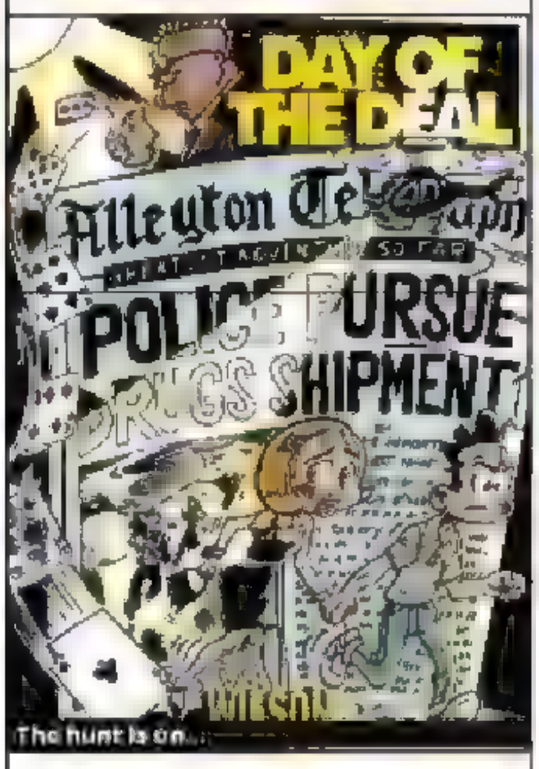
Afterwards, the status quo of the X-universe doesn't appear to have been greatly altered, but with hints that the flame-haired Hope is linked to the Phoenix Force, there could be some intriguing developments ahead. The artwork also proves inconsistent, with Greg Land's eye-catching photo-realism and Terry Dodson's quirky cartooning standing out, while muddy colouring hampers Mike Choi's impressive painterly style.

In comparison, the Daredevil-centred *Shadowland*, which is mostly set within the confines of New York, is like a breath of fresh air. Scripted by the Man Without Fear's regular scribe Andy Diggle, it begins by posing many tantalising questions, most pertinently: how did new Hand boss Matt Murdock move so far over to the dark side that he ruthlessly slaughters Bullseye at the end of the first issue?

It's great to see previously forgotten characters like the Shroud, Paladin and Misty Knight getting their chance to shine again in *Daredevil* co-writer Antony Johnston's spin-off series *Blood On The Streets*. Meanwhile, the parallel storyline of Hornhead's regular monthly contrasts neatly with *Shadowland's* sweeping events as Matt's law partner Foggy Nelson and private detective Dakota North are caught in the crossfire of their friend's reckless actions.

Diggle is also ably supported by Billy Tan's dynamic, manga-esque work, with the first issue's final splash page of Daredevil running his blade through his old nemesis paying a neat tribute to the classic scene in Frank Miller's seminal '80s run when Bullseye murders Elektra for the first time. A very promising start, with hopefully the best yet to come.

Stephen Jewell



DAY OF THE DEAL

WRITER: Jason Wilson
ARTIST: Jason Wilson
PUBLISHER: Dealer Comics
OUT: NOW!

Far from glamourising drugs, as some hysterical tabloids would have it, Jason Wilson's true event-inspired *Day Of The Deal* is an entirely terrific tale of ordinary people's wrongdoings and the price that's paid.

Stan, Kayce and Mikey make a little extra cash on the wrong side of the law, growing and dealing drugs. When Mikey gets involved in a caper that's a little too high-risk, things inevitably end in tragedy. It's a simple tale, breathlessly and confidently told; Wilson's expressive cartooning and dense storytelling combine with sympathetic, well-drawn characters to create a slice of life that's rarely less than compelling. The final 20 or so pages, which more or less just document a journey in a van, ratchet the tens on to excruciating levels. This is what comics do best – words and pictures combining in perfect harmony. **Jes Bickham**

Jason Wilson's art brims with character.

KICK-ASS

DVD REVIEW!

Fun, foul-mouthed action that pulls no punches

CERTIFICATE: 15
RUNNING TIME: 118 minutes
PRICE: Blu-Ray £24.99; DVD £19.99
DIRECTOR: Matthew Vaughn
WRITERS: Matthew Vaughn, Jane Goldman
CAST: Aaron Johnson, Chloë Grace Moretz, Nicolas Cage, Mark Strong, Christopher Mintz-Plasse
OUT: NOW!

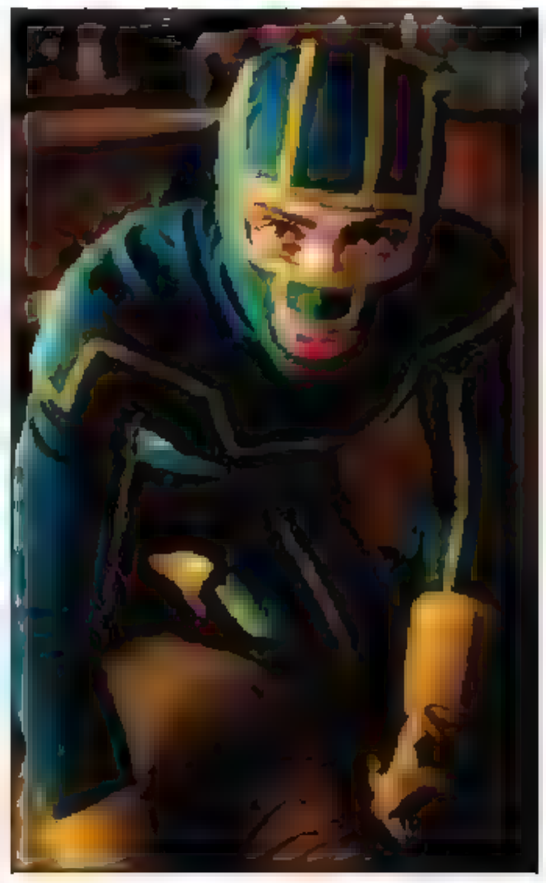
FILM EXTRAS

Kick-Ass is a movie that *demands* to be seen. It's morally dubious, horrendously violent and frequently hammy, but it's also searingly entertaining and completely fearless. It's a comic book movie that *knows* it's a comic book movie – and for 118 blood-splattered, bullet-strewn minutes, you simply won't be able to tear your eyes away.

Riffing on the origin stories of Batman, Spider-Man and Wolverine, the plot sees Johnson's Dave Lizewski don a dodgy green catsuit and take on the eponymous role of Kick-Ass, a zero-skills masked vigilante who gets his face (and body) rearranged in the film's opening half-hour, before coming to the attention of genuine superhero team Hit Girl (Moretz) and Big Daddy (a borderline-preposterous Cage). They're on a mission to obliterate Strong's Frank D'Amico, but D'Amico has instead zeroed in on Kick-Ass, whom he thinks is trying to bring down his empire. The result is a balls-to-the-wall mash-up of blood, guts, guns and C-bombs, expertly choreograped by director Matthew Vaughn.

In fact, while the cast are broadly great (none more so than Moretz, who, as the fantastically inappropriate Hit Girl, dominates every scene she's in), Vaughn is very much at the film's core. You can see why he wanted to circumvent the studio system, and the effect is right there on the screen. this movie *zings* with joyful disregard for the rules, celebrating its utter ridiculousness and revelling in its head-popping, chest-knifing brutality. And yet, while it's violent, it's not nasty. Humour is sewn into the fabric of the film: the characters are OTT, the set pieces are big and overblown and the finale is a noisy, *Matrix*-style blowout in D'Amico's apartment, backed by Elvis's 'American Trilogy'.

Vaughn's single-mindedness certainly comes across in the extras. He talks openly about the difficult gestation of the film, especially in the excellent 114-minute, five-chapter 'A New Kind Of Superhero', but those with a hundred-weight of wallet might want to opt for the limited



edition collector's box set; not only will you be able to watch the claret spray in super-crisp HD, Millar and Romita Jr's original graphic novel is chucked in for good measure.

Whichever edition you opt for, you won't come away dissatisfied. If *The Dark Knight* redefined superhero movies, *Kick-Ass* repatriates them and adds in a gigantic dollop of irony. It's not nearly as clever as it thinks it is – but when it's this much fun, it hardly seems to matter.
Tim Weaver

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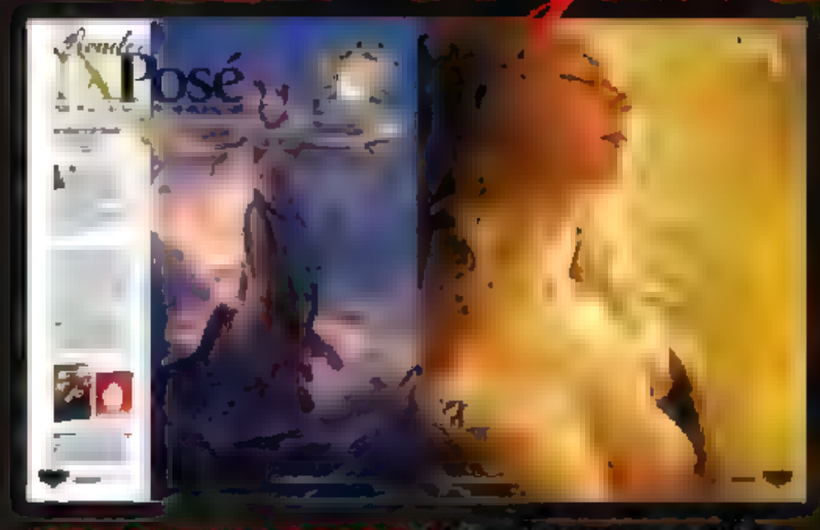

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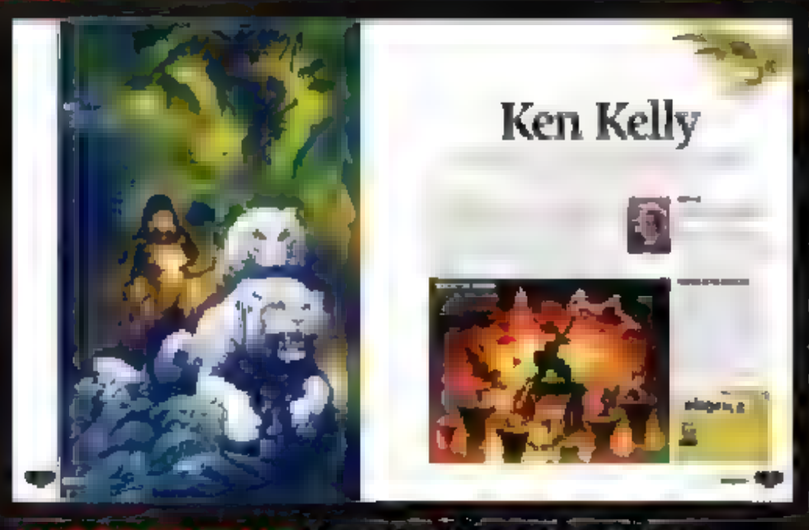

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REBELLION ROUND-UP

Two Dredds and some ABC Warriors from publisher Rebellion...

JUDGE DREDD: THE COMPLETE CASE FILES 18

WRITERS: John Wagner, Alan Grant, Garth Ennis

ARTISTS: Various

JUDGE DREDD TOUR OF DUTY: THE BACKLASH

WRITER: John Wagner

ARTISTS: Various

ABC WARRIORS: THE VOLGAN WAR 3

WRITER: Pat Mills

ARTIST: Clint Langley

Sometimes you can want something so much that when you get it you just don't know what to do with it.

When John Wagner stepped aside and self-confessed fan Garth Ennis took over on *Judge Dredd*, the younger writer probably thought all his birthdays had come at once. Yet *Dredd*, as most writers discover, is a tricky one to get right.

The latest case files continue with the post-Wagner age, and creak under the weight of expectation dumped onto Ennis's shoulders. It turns out that being a fan can actually get in the way of being a good writer, and history has not been kind.

John Burns's atmospheric art and Peter Doherty's illustrative debut can be properly savoured, but they salvage lacklustre writing that feels as though it's apologising for something. Laboured puns and weak characters aside, Ennis does step up to the plate when Wagner briefly returns to collaborate on Mega-City One's historic referendum on democracy, but the effect is short-lived. The excessively reprinted Predator knock-off from 'Raptaur' proves that even Alan Grant, who spent so long working with Wagner, can struggle with *Dredd*.

Ennis is not a bad writer, but by his own admission he was just too much of a fan to do this project. You can almost hear him tiptoeing around Wagner's world as though it's a museum.

The first 'Tour Of Duty' collection, by contrast, represents the opening chapter in one of the finest pieces of comic book writing to emerge from *2000 AD* or, indeed, anywhere. Taut, dramatic and well paced, the storyline sees Wagner performing at the very height of his powers, with political intrigue, characters of rare depth and a knack for knowing when to turn on the violence and when to back off.

Like so many would-be *Dredd* scribes, Ennis hasn't moved beyond the central character's surface, yet Wagner not only does it with ease, he makes the fascist authoritarian human and flawed. Sound like base hyperbole? Consider for a moment that 'Tour Of Duty' has its roots in a plot that appeared 20 years ago and is still unfolding today. This really is storytelling at its best, and although it's difficult to adequately encompass every thread that feeds into it, this is as good a place to start as any.

Pat Mills's ABC Warriors are, give or take the odd prolonged holiday, as woven into the fabric of *2000 AD* as Dredd, although the history of the seven war droids from Mars is a tad more complicated. Mills's writing style has evolved over the years, and what was once a political sensibility with a razor's edge has dulled with time. But among the obvious references to the modern world, there are still nice lines.

Even after all this time, Mills can write a damn good fight, and sewer droid Ro-Jaws hasn't stopped being funny in nearly 35 years. Langley's work, which merges photos with digital art, jumps between being stunning and confusing, but there's no denying that it's lovely to look at.

Mills and Wagner were giants in the comic field before Ennis had supped his first Guinness. These tomes are salutatory lessons for any would-be pretenders out there. **Michael Molcher**

Fear Agent harks back to classic pulp sci-fi.

FEAR AGENT VOLUME 1: RE-IGNITION

WRITER: Rick Remender
ARTISTS: Tony Moore, Sean Parsons, Mike Manley, Lee Loughridge, Rus Wooten
PUBLISHER: Dark Horse
OUT: **NOW!**

Heath Houston's life is one big problem. He's in a backwater system with no money to buy booze or fuel, and the only job in town is returning some stolen terraforming gear. It should be simple but, as Heath soon finds out, there's no such thing as simple for the last Fear Agent...

Fear Agent is flat-out, foot-down science fiction that balances modern sensibilities with retro stylings. Space helmets are bubbles, rockets have fins, giant brains abound and every female character wears skin-tight clothing. In the hands of a lesser team this would risk coming across as goofy, but here it does nothing but lift the book. Remender has a great ear for dialogue and Heath's fondness for Samuel Clemens, along with his tragedy-soaked past, give the book real weight – as does Moore's gritty, grounded art.

If there's a problem here, it's that the book is a little self-conscious at times, with Heath's 'good ol' boy in space' routine grating and the female characters more than a little objectified. Get past that, though, and *Fear Agent* is a surprising, nasty and fun trip into a universe where one man can make a difference, however drunk he may be... **Alasdair Stuart**

A SICKNESS IN THE FAMILY

WRITER: Denise Mina
ARTIST: Antonio Fuso
PUBLISHER: DC Vertigo
OUT: **OCTOBER 13**

Like fellow Scottish crime scribe Ian Rankin, Denise Mina cut her comic-writing teeth penning the adventures of John Constantine, memorably taking the incorrigible paranormal detective north of the border when she assumed the reins on his monthly title *Hellblazer* for 12 issues back in the year of 2006.

Set in her native Glasgow, there are shades of *Hellblazer* about *A Sickness In The Family*, her first original graphic novel for Vertigo's burgeoning crime imprint. The story centres around the highly dysfunctional Ushers, whose old house is apparently haunted by the spirit of a witch who was executed on the site in 1597.

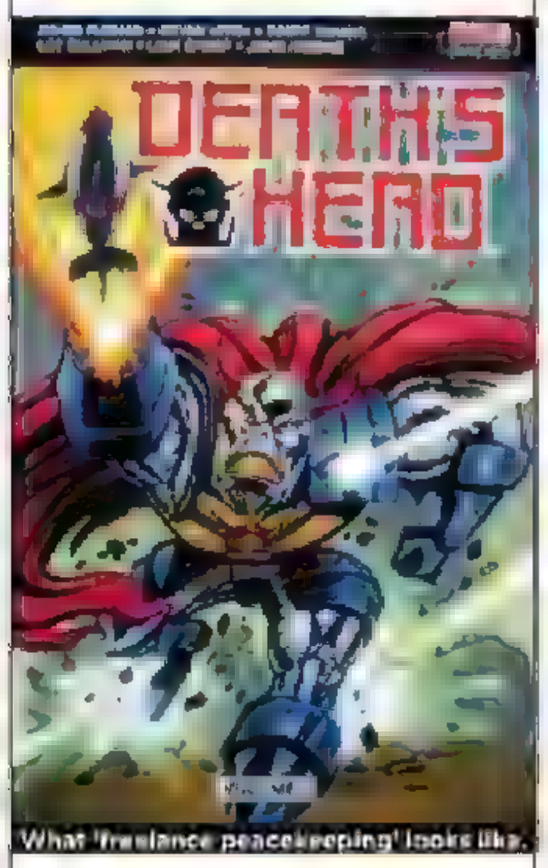
With parents Ted and Biddy at each other's throats, elder son William a drug-addicted Oxford dropout and daughter Amy only concerned about taking over the family business, adopted son Sam is the only one left to take care of bedridden grandmother Martha. It all starts to unravel when their Polish downstairs neighbours die one Christmas after a domestic dispute. From that point on, members of the family start dropping dead in increasingly gruesome circumstances.

Mina makes expert use of biting social satire while ratcheting up the tension, and the story's final twist is implausible but delightful all the same. Italian artist Antonio Fusa's grey-toned black-and-white artwork is also suitably moody. Let's hope we don't have to wait another three years before Mina's next comic book outing. **Stephen Jewell**

DEATH'S HEAD Volume 1

WRITER: Simon Furman
ARTIST: Bryan Hitch, Geoff Senior, Lee Sullivan, Liam Sharp, Carl Higgins
PUBLISHER: Marvel
OUT: **NOW!**

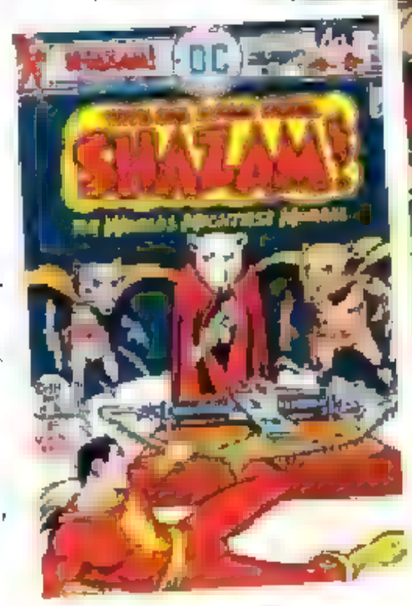
Death's Head is a cult figure – a polite, cheerfully violent mechanical bounty hunter who debuted in the *Transformers* title Marvel UK put out in the 1980s. He's come a long way since then, most recently appearing in *SWORD*, but it's his earliest appearances that are collected here. These include his debut in 'High Noon, Tex', a single page story illustrated by future *Authority* artist Bryan Hitch as well as his encounter with the Seventh Doctor and the first seven issues of his own series. Dumped on Earth in 8172 by the Doctor, Death's Head winds up in L.A. Working, reluctantly, with a partner he gets caught up in a gang war, runs the most apathetic witness protection program committed to print and winds up the unwitting target of two top assassins. Mysterious undertakers, genetically enhanced assassins, agoraphobic criminal cults and futuristic mobsters all clash with our 'hero' and come up short in a series that balances violence and quietly maniacal black humour to perfection. Illustrated by some of the best artists of the time – and now for that matter – this is an underground gem that deserves to shine. Buy it or he'll have a word, yes?
Alasdair Stuart



DC COMICS: The 75th Anniversary Poster Book

WRITER: Robert Schnakenberg
ARTIST: Various
PUBLISHER: Quirk Books
OUT: **Now!**

What a beautiful thing this book is, and the perfect commemorative publication for DC Comics' 75th anniversary. Comprising 100 comic covers, each perforated for removal and sticking on your wall, it's a delightful stroll through DC's history.



From 1935's *Fun Magazine* to Grant Morrison's *Batman RIP*, all the big hitters are covered. But there are also some terrifically out-there nuggets buried within here: highlights include some fantastically creepy *House Of Mystery* covers ("Do you dare enter…" they taunt), *True-To-Life Girls' Romances* and *Weird War Tales'* Primate Patrol. There's a selection of non-superhero material here, which is only right and proper, along with classic spandex treats such as *Detective Comics* issue 275, starring Zebra Batman, and Superboy being spanked by Smallville High's principal on the cover of 1955's *Superboy* number 55.

Both a history lesson and a simple, supremely enjoyable celebration of DC's comic art, this would be essential even if Robert Schankenberg hadn't included entertaining, informative commentaries on every piece included. Brilliant stuff. **Jes Bickham**

MARVEL SUPERHEROES 4D EXHIBITION

VENUE: Madame Tussauds
PRICE: £25

With prices starting at £25, a day at Madame Tussauds certainly isn't cheap. There's a reasonable amount there though, and the exhibits will be added to over the next few years.

The waxworks are, as you would expect, excellent. An enormous Hulk is genuinely impressive. Iron Man, meanwhile, is just cool.

They've made sure adults have something to do (a highlight is the replica of Wolverine's claws, which is simple but effective) but we would have preferred to have seen more. Information is scarce in places, and it would be nice to see some real-life history. The gallery of famous comic covers is lovely, but badly needs more information to give it some depth. A waxwork model of Stan Lee seems like an enormous missed opportunity.

The ten-minute '4D' movie is set in the former planetarium. The much-ballyhooed fourth dimension is very 'William Castle', with gimmicked seats, sprays of water and 3D. It's fluff, but it's entertaining and a lot of fun to watch.

Overall, kids will love it, but we'd like to see more depth for the adults. As it is, it's fun but a bit shallow and corporate. **Christopher Brosnahan**

The Sign Of Four is one of the best adaptations here.
WHEN OREGGON, LESTRADE OR ATHELNEY JONES ARE OUT OF THEIR DEPTHS — THEIR CUSTOMARY STATE — THE MATTER IS LAID BEFORE ME, FOR A SPECIALIST'S OPINION.
I CLAIM NO CREDIT. THE WORK ITSELF IS MY HIGHEST REWARD.
Holmes relaxes in trademark style – drugs and a comfy chair.

SELFMADEHERO ROUND-UP

HEART OF DARKNESS
WRITER: David Zane Mairowitz
ARTIST: Catherine Anyango
OUT: **NOW!**
★ ★ ★ ½

DANCE BY THE LIGHT OF THE MOON
ARTIST AND WRITER: Judith Vanistendael
OUT: **NOW!**
★ ★ ★ ★ ★

A TALE OF TWO CITIES
ARTIST: Ryuta Osada
ADAPTED BY: David Zane Mairowitz
OUT: **NOW!**
★ ★ ★ ½

THE SIGN OF FOUR
WRITER: Ian Edginton
ARTIST: I.N.J. Culbard
OUT: **NOW!**

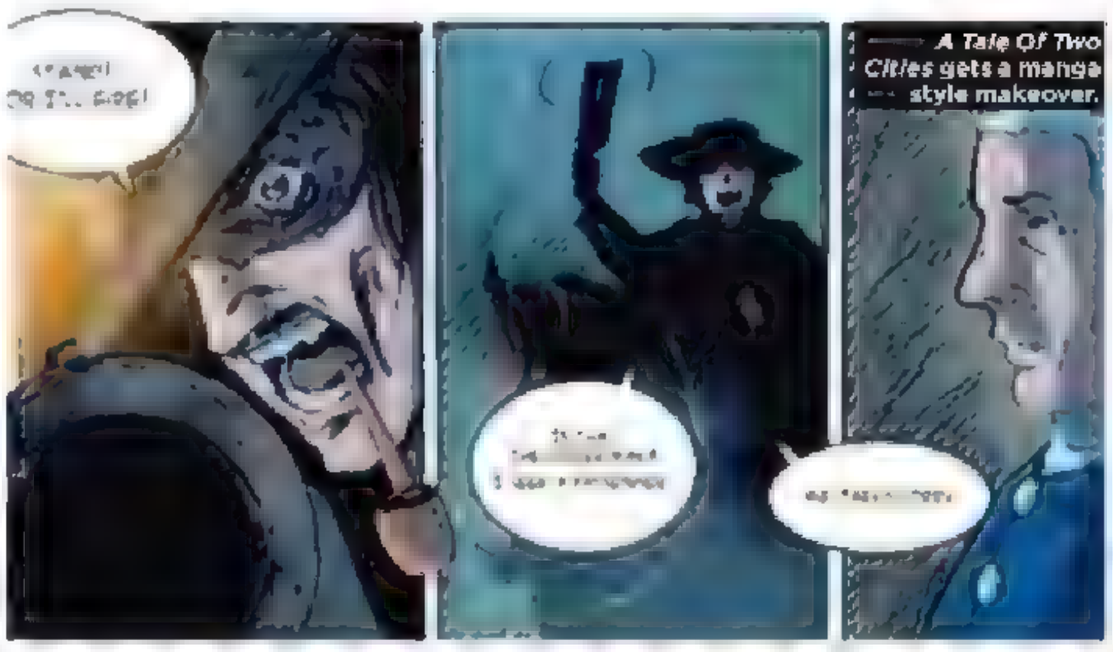
Four new volumes from SelfMadeHero, a London graphic novel firm specialising in the more literary end of stripped storytelling. Three here are straight comic book adaptations of Joseph Conrad's *Heart Of Darkness*, Charles Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities* and Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Sign Of Four* respectively. We're never sure if books adapted into comics are worth the effort; especially when we're talking about a most word-for-word adaptations of the text. But, that said, these are very good adaptations.

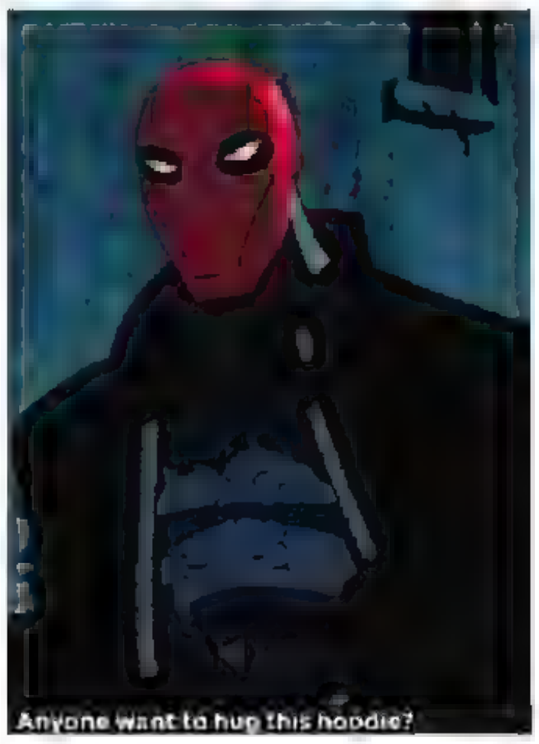
Holmes works well, the sleuth slipping as he does into a variety of media with a minimum of fuss. In their fourth collaboration on a classic novel adaptation, Edginton provides a streamlined script, while animation director Culbard's *ligne claire* style does the zip of Conan Doyle's story good service, although his Andamanese islander Tonga is a caricature. Doyle's character was too, but Culbard's Tonga looks more like a goblin than a Victorian's idea of an exotic indigene.

The other two volumes were both adapted by David Mairowitz. Dickens's blasting of the French Revolution comes to life most in the evocative splash pages by Japanese artist Osada, while elsewhere it's pretty much standard Westernised manga fare. *Heart Of Darkness*, on the other hand, has oodles of atmosphere throughout courtesy of artist Anyanga, who uses flat washed-out sepia to bring the horrors of the colonial Congo to terrible life. Unfortunately, her drawing varies considerably. Some pages feature marvellous sketches of the human form and face, the book's power coming from the juxtaposition of the living and the dead, but at other times the images are akin to those that adorn a thousand comic fanzine covers, speaking of talent not yet fully realised. This makes it both the most and least successful of the three.

Onto another Afro-Belgian tale – this one rather more modern Vandenstael's *Dance By The Light Of The Moon* tells the semi-autobiographical story of the author's love affair with Abou, an asylum seeker dogged by horrible memories of civil strife in Togo. At first her artwork feels knowingly childish and the story carries with it the whiff of liberal screed, yet it soon develops into a powerful look into the complexities of the human heart and prejudice, which is made all the more effective by being both personal and honest. Meanwhile, the cartoony artwork carries effective weight by disintegrating periodically into Abou's nightmarish recollections.

This is why *Dance By The Light Of The Moon* works better than the other efforts this month. Comics are great vehicles for original works, especially those that deal with raw or powerful subjects (who can forget *Maus*?). They aren't so special when they ape other media, especially cinema, rather than playing to their own strengths, leaving these adaptations in an uncomfortable halfway house. **Guy Haley**





UNDER THE RED HOOD

Another fine piece of Gotham marvelousness

PG-13/75 mins

DIRECTOR: Brandon Vietti

WRITER: Judd Winick

CAST: Bruce Greenwood, Jensen Ackles, John Di Maggio, Jason Isaacs, Wade Williams

OUT: **NOW! (US Import)**

DVD REVIEW!

Under The Red Hood draws heavily on established *Batman* mythology, conflating two comic tales from 1988 and 2005 to retell the saga of Jason Todd, Batman's number two Robin – his death at the hands of the Joker, his resurrection and his reinvention as unstable vigilante The Red Hood. Batman and his ex-protégé are at each other's throats throughout as The Red Hood tries to clean Gotham up his way, but it all means a very personal end in what's ultimately an investigation of Batman's ethics.

It's ground that's been trodden many times before, but that's okay when we're dealing with mythic archetypes. The animation is a beautiful synthesis of US and Eastern cartoon traditions. Computer-aided sequences lend big-screen action quality to proceedings. The voice cast is roundly supreme, and although we're missing Mark Hamill's cackling as the Joker, John Di Maggio gives us a suitably evil interpretation of the Clown Prince of Crime. If the movie has a failing, it's that the story feels a little small at times, veering into the soap-opera end of comic-dom, but for the most part, *Under The Red Hood* reinforces this simple truth: when it comes to superhero cartoons, there's no besting the Batman. **Guy Haley**

FVZA

WRITER: David Hine

ARTISTS: Roy Allan Martinez, Wayne Nichols

PUBLISHER: Radical

OUT: **NOW!**

FVZA stands for *Federal Vampire Zombie Agency*, and it springs from a popular website about the titular organisation, which operates in a parallel world where both undead elements are very real viral threats. This comic adaptation by David Hine – collected here as a graphic novel – is a terrific take on the source material, detailing the FVZA's attempts to stall a zombie epidemic (which is all, in turn, a vampire plot).

While the protagonists – Dr Hugo Pecos and his beast-busting grandkids – take some warming to, Hine's greatest success lies in showing us the world of *FVZA*, and in particular the utter horror of zombies and vampires. He details the transformation from human into zombie, and it's just ghastly; a gradual process of dehumanisation and transformation that hits all the right phobic buttons. (And when we learn that zombies are evolving, and a rotting mother cultivates maggots in her own necrotic flesh for her undead offspring, the screw is turned unbearably again.)

Similarly, we see that there's nothing romantic about vampires; you won't be keeping your hair, for starters, because this version of undeath means you'll rapidly start looking like Max Schreck's Nosferatu. A well-balanced mix of horror and action, Hine and co have crafted a compulsive and gruesome yarn. Here's hoping there's more on the way. **Jes Bickham**

SPIDER-MAN ROUND-UP

DVD REVIEW!

More animated nostalgia for gentlenerds of a certain age

SPIDER-MAN 5000: Season 3, Volume 2

U /132 mins /£14.99

OUT: **NOW!**

SPIDER-MAN AND HIS AMAZING FRIENDS Season 1 complete

U/ 310 mins /£14.99

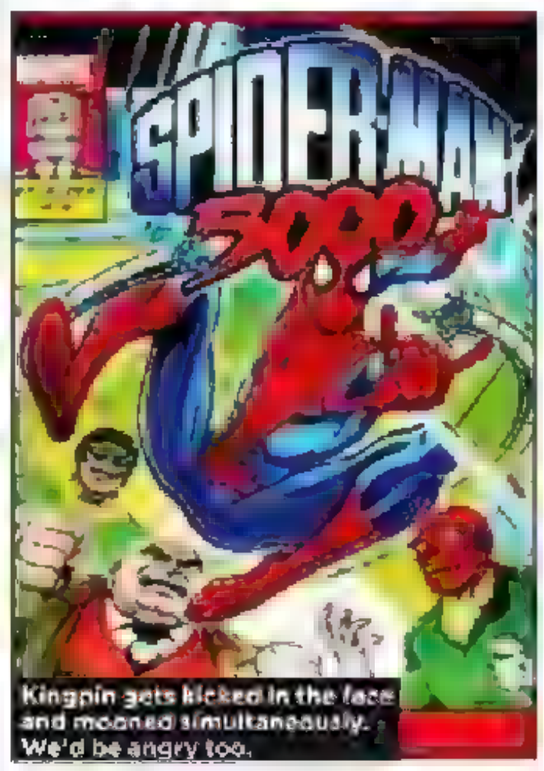
OUT: **NOW!**

Every generation has a favoured cartoon version of their comic book heroes, and for us, it's these two Spideys from 1981.

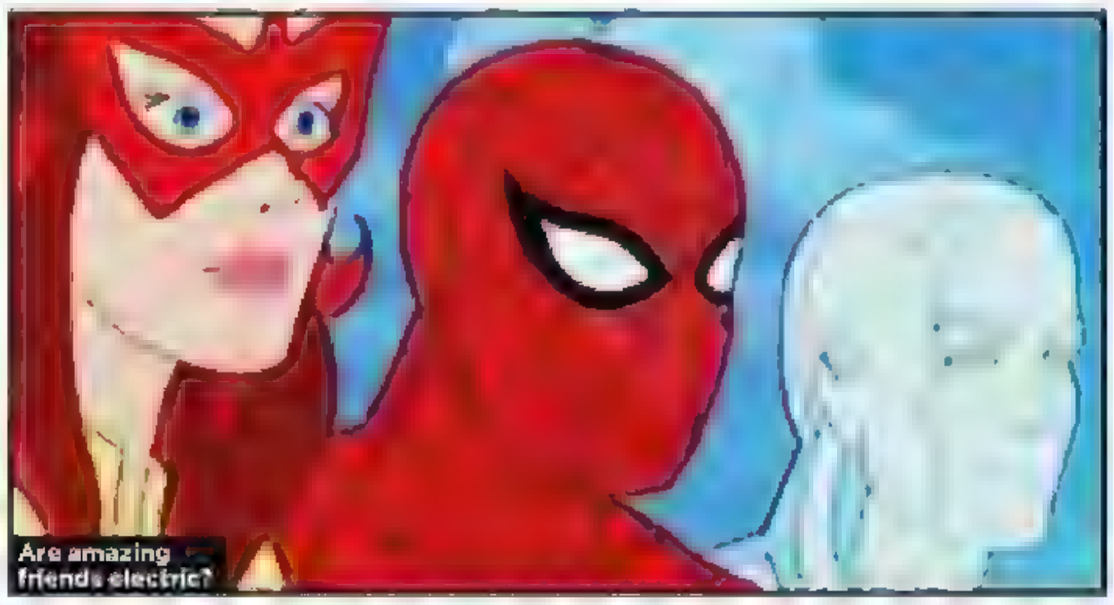
Spider-Man And His Amazing Friends sees webhead in an unlikely team-up with mutants Iceman and Firestar – and her silly little dog Miss Lion – while they're all at university together. (Firestar was created specifically for the TV show.) Together they fight a variety of classic *Spidey* villains in a universe that's recognisably Marvel – the very first episode gets self-referential as our heroes' shy and retiring alter egos dress up as other super-types for a fancy dress party. That's pretty post-modern for 1981!

Otherwise, it's a product of its time, with made-for-TV baddies such as Video-Man (made of data from a video arcade) waving the flag for the '80s. This box set contains all 13 episodes from the first series.

Airing at the same time as *Amazing Friends* was *Spider-Man* (the '5000' is a later addition to differentiate it from other *Spidey* toons). Even though the third season included the Amazing Friends' origin story (sadly, that's included on the disc before this one), the connection between the two series ends there – the sound



effects might be the same, but the voice casts are totally different! Like *Amazing Friends*, this is a full-on Marvel universe, featuring Ka-zar, Kraven and more, plus plenty of lovely old-school monologuing. Our Spider-Sense is tingling... **Guy Haley**



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Jes Bickham,
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WARREN ELLIS

He's the writer behind *Planetary*, *The Authority*, *Transmetropolitan*, *Ministry Of Space* and plenty more besides. Behold as comics' premier futurist opens his brain to *Comic Heroes*!

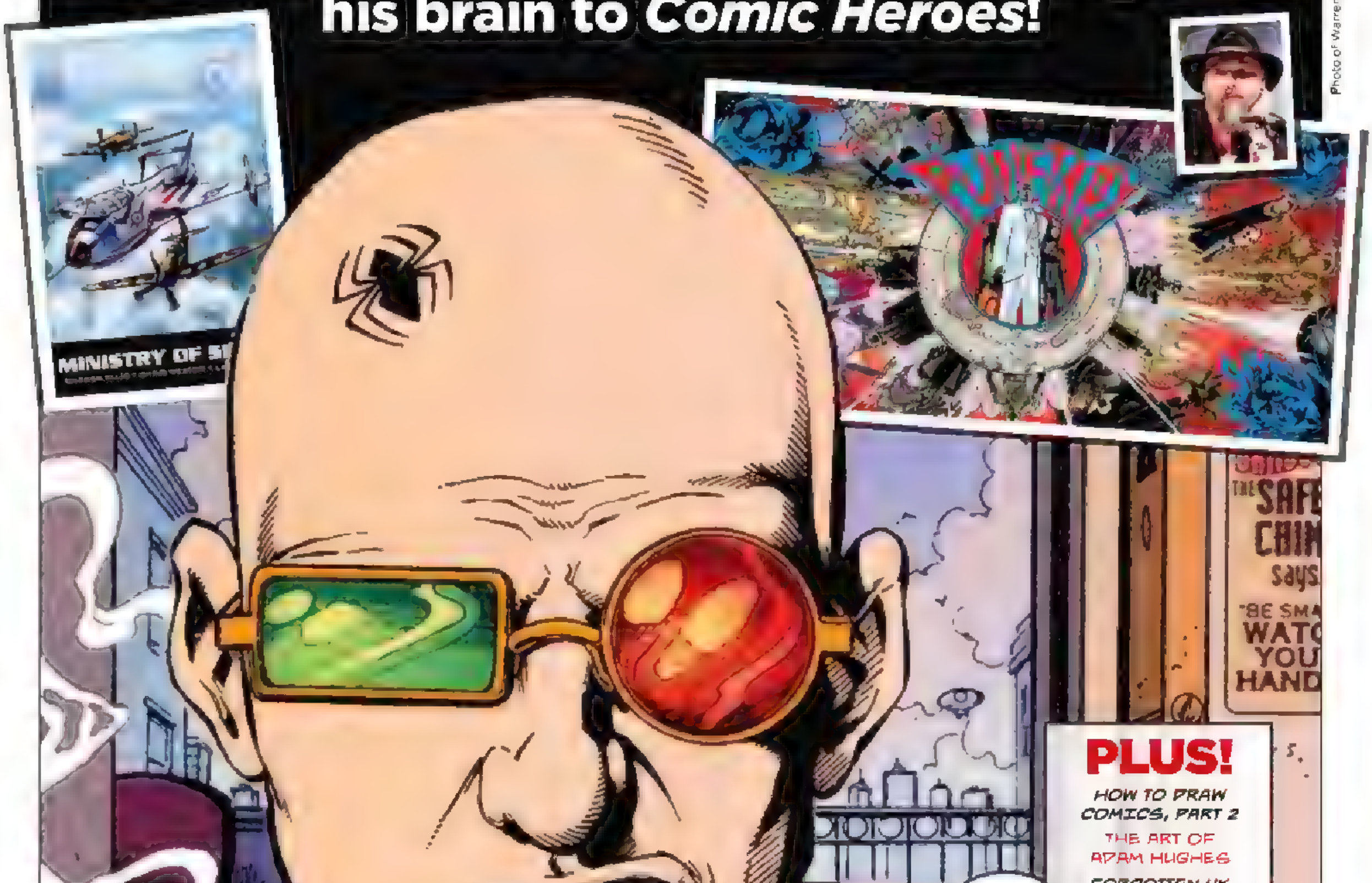

Photo of Warren E. s by Gage Skidmore

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MY INSPIRATION
MARK BUCKINGHAM

You'll probably know Mark Buckingham best for his artwork on the long-running Vertigo series *Fables*. However, he's had a long and distinguished career, working with Neil Gaiman on *Marvelman*, *Sandman* and its *Death* spin-offs, and much more besides. Here, he tells us all about what gets him to the drawing board in the morning...

1 JACK KIRBY

A creative genius – not just an artist, but a primal force in comics. Always dynamic, with an inexhaustible imagination. His work was some of the first to catch my eye as a child, and studying his pencils more recently has helped add weight and energy to my own work. (I collect original Kirby pencil art.)

2 MY OLD GANG

I would never have considered a career in comics if not for my gang of comic creator friends, who I met while studying design in Staffordshire. Shane Oakley, D'Israeli, Gary Crutchley and the rest encouraged and inspired me, and still do today.

3 MUSIC

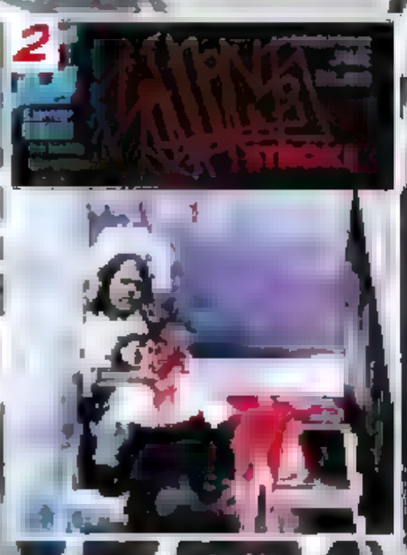
I always draw while listening to music (or BBC Radio 4). Progressive rock and British folk music tend to dominate, but The Divine Comedy, Ben Folds, Rufus Wainwright, XTC and anything from Gustav Holst to My Fair Lady can help to keep me inspired.

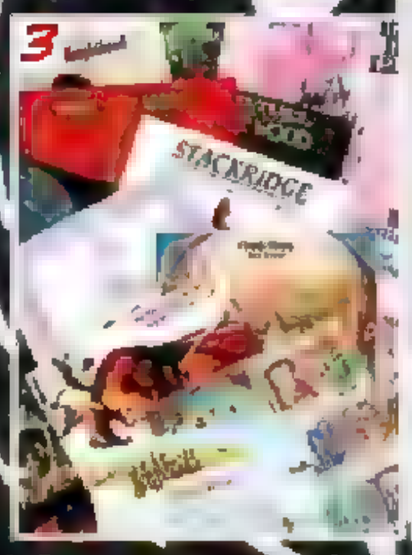
4 DOCTOR WHO

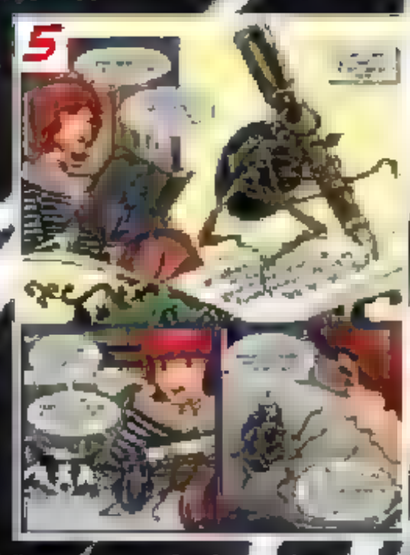
This has been my favourite TV show since my parents bought their first television when I was four years old and I watched Jon Pertwee's Third Doctor in action. I'm a huge fan of new Who, too. It's always fun, eccentric and inspired. Guaranteed to make me feel good and work well.

5 IRMA

My greatest inspiration these days is my lovely wife Irma. She always pushes me to be my best, has an eye for detail and a quick mind, and is forever tolerant of the long hours at the drawing board. She also inspires my work directly, with Rose Red's appearance in Fables.







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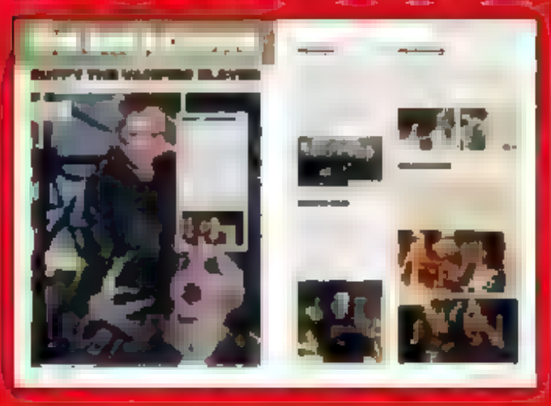

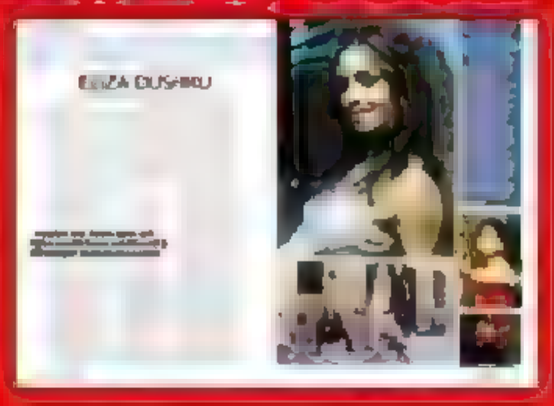

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Guests confirmed so far also include Juliet Landau and Clare Kramer, who portrayed Drusilla and Glory in BUFFY, Christian Kane and Julie Benz who played Lindsey and Darla on ANGEL, and Stephen Moyer and Marianne Jean-Baptiste who appeared in TRUE BLOOD as Godric and Hollow.

ACTIVITIES AT THE EVENT INCLUDE

- Opening and Closing Ceremonies
- Question and Answer sessions with the guests
- Opportunities for photos and autographs with the stars
- Competitions held throughout the weekend
- Make up demonstrations
- The Vampire Ball and other parties throughout the weekend

Tickets are priced at £66:50 for Regular and £135 for Gold, and give access for all three days and can be ordered by calling 07930 256 979.

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- COMPETITIONS

Please note that guests appear subject to acting work commitments. Should a guest have to pull out from appearing at the convention every step to secure a suitable replacement will be taken. We cannot guarantee that every attendee will be able to get an autograph or photo with the guests. We reserve the right to refuse admission to certain attendees and dealers. Absolutely no refunds or transfer of tickets.

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ISSUE TWO!

It's not every day that you manage to get preview pages of a comic born from the mind of the mighty Stan Lee, but that's just one of many pleasures in issue two of *Sidekick*; say hello to *Soldier Zero*!

We've also got a splendid variety of other material from British true-crime caper *Day Of The Deal* to moody Lovecraft adaptation *At The Mountains Of Madness* and, excitingly, Colin Lorimer's superb *UXB*, which is currently looking for a publisher – a state of affairs that shouldn't last for long, if there's any justice. He's like John Higgins and Warren Ellis rolled into one. Enjoy!

Jes Bickham, Editor

CONTENTS

PAGE 3
ZONE RUNNERS
Kane, Kya, Anna, Roy and Ely are teenage field agents for the MoD. Their job is stop and round up refugees from a devastated alien infested version of our world. They are... the Zone Runners!
Writer: Chris Atkins
Artist: Marc Olivent
Publisher: Arcana Comics
Out: TBC 2011
© 2010 Arcana Comics
www.arcanacomics.com

PAGE 8
AT THE MOUNTAINS OF MADNESS
An adaptation of of HP Lovecraft's classic novella in which a scientific expedition to Antarctica makes horrifying discoveries
Writer: INJ Culbard (from the original story by HP Lovecraft)
Artist: INJ Culbard
Publisher: SelfMadeHero
Out: 28 October 2010
© 2010 SelfMadeHero
www.selfmadehero.com

PAGE 14
LONE JUSTICE vol 2
This is the story of one man's journey from wealth and power to poverty and another sort of power, as his city – Depression-era New York – is blasted by a spree of lawlessness. They called him Lone Justice. And his story is the stuff of legend.
Writer: Robert Tinnell and Mark Wheatley
Artist: Mark Wheatley
Publisher: IDW/ComicMix
Out: February 2011
© & TM Robert Tinnell and Mark Wheatley
www.comicmix.com

PAGE 20
UXB
Experimental anti-terrorist skin suits fuse to the bodies of three teenage brothers in a post-war London. They could be the saviours of mankind; instead, their interests remain video games, violence and porn.
Writer: Colin Lorimer
Artist: Colin Lorimer
Publisher: TBC
Out: TBC
© 2010 Colin Lorimer
http://lubbert-das.blogspot.com

PAGE 26
DAY OF THE DEAL
Inspired by real events, three ordinary people get caught up in the murky world of drug-dealing in a caper shortly to go very wrong...
Writer: Jason Wilson
Artist: Jason Wilson
Publisher: Dealer Comics
Out: Now
© 2010 Jason Wilson
www.smugglingvacation.co.uk

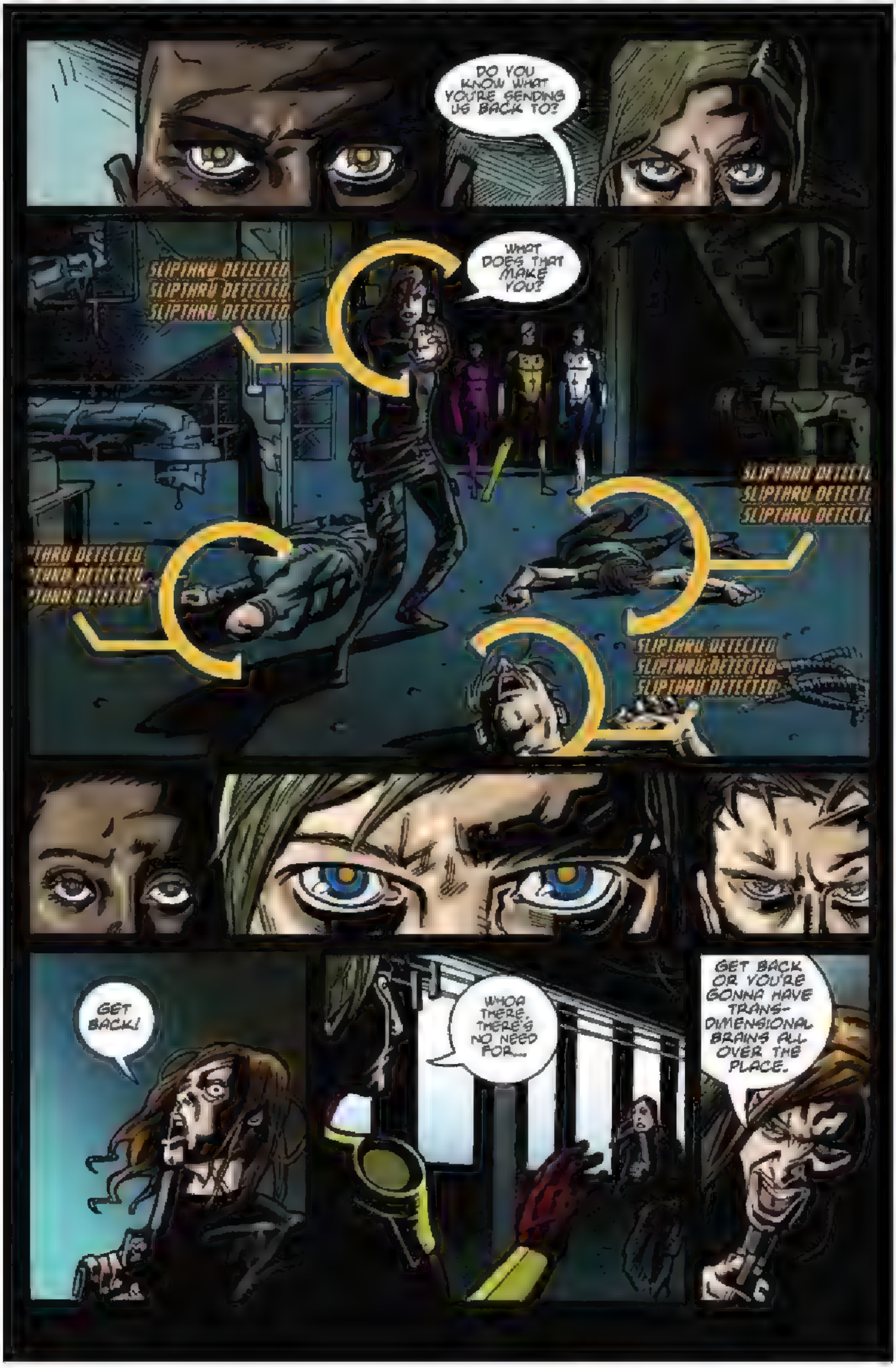
PAGE 30
STAN LEE'S SOLDIER ZERO
When an alien parasite falls to Earth, wheelchair-bound college student Stewart Travers becomes infected, and goes through super-human changes that no mortal could imagine
Writer: Paul Cornell
Artist: Javier Pina
Publisher: Boom! Studios
Out: Late October
© 2010 Boom! Entertainment and POW! Entertainment
www.boom-studios.net

HUZZIT
DID-
DID WE MAKE IT?
I THINK SO.
NOT MUCH OF AN IMPROVEMENT THOUGH.
WELL IN THAT CASE...

... WHY DON'T WE ARRANGE A LITTLE TRIP BACK HOME?

IT'S THEM!!
THEY'RE JUST KIDS!
SHOOT 'EM!!
RAKKA
RAKKA
RAKKA
RAKKA
RAKKA
RAKKA
TA
TA
TA
TA
ZOT
SHRAKKZZ
ZZZZKKKKKKK
DZOTT
KZZ

OUCH!
DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA WHAT YOU'RE DOING?


DO YOU KNOW WHAT YOU'RE SENDING US BACK TO?
WHAT DOES THAT MAKE YOU?
SLIPTHRU DETECTED
SLIPTHRU DETECTED
SLIPTHRU DETECTED
SLIPTHRU DETECTED
SLIPTHRU DETECTED
SLIPTHRU DETECTED
SLIPTHRU DETECTED
SLIPTHRU DETECTED
SLIPTHRU DETECTED
GET BACK!
WHOA THERE. THERE'S NO NEED FOR...
GET BACK OR YOU'RE GONNA HAVE TRANS-DIMENSIONAL BRAINS ALL OVER THE PLACE.

On October 20th we regained open water and reached the Antarctic Circle. Six days later a strong land-blink appeared on the south. By noon we could see the Admiralty Range — a vast and lofty snow-clad outpost of the great unknown.

The last lap of our voyage, as we rounded Cape Adare, was vivid and fancy-stirring.

Gusts of wind swept through those desolate summits with the vague suggestion of a wild, half-sentient, musical piping that seemed to me disquieting and even dimly terrible.

TEKELI-LI!!!

TEKELI-LI!!! TEKELI-LI

TEKELI-LI!!
TEKELI-LI!!
TEKELI-LI!!
TEKELI-LI!!
TEKELI-LI!!
TEKELI-LI!!
TEKELI-LI!!
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TEKELI-LI!!

TEKELI-LI!! TEKELI-LI!! TEKELI-LI!!
TEKELI-LI!! TEKELI-LI!! TEKELI-LI!!

AL AZIF -

NECRONOMICON

THE BOOK OF THE ARAB ABDUL AL-HAZRED

TEKELI-LI!!!

TEKELI-LI!!!

TEKELI-LI!!!

TEKELI-LI!!!

November 8th. We entered McMurdo Sound and stood off the coast in the lee of smoking Mount Erebus.

DARKNESS.

PARDON?

EREBUS. PRIMORDIAL GREEK GOD OF THE DARK CORNERS OF THE EARTH. THE SON OF CHAOS.

YOU READ MORE THAN JUST DIME NOVELS I TAKE IT?

AND THEN SOME.

WE'RE AT THE VERY BOTTOM OF THE WORLD, PROFESSOR...

IT'S A FAR MORE POIGNANT, MORE COMPLEX THING THAN I HAVE EVER READ ABOUT OR COULD EVER HAVE IMAGINED.

AND WE HAVE YET TO VENTURE FURTHER THAN THE LIKES OF SCOTT AND SHACKLETON.

AND HERE WE ARE IN THE PRESENCE OF *PRIMORDIAL GODS.*

WHY DO WE SEE CRIMINALS INSTEAD OF BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN NEED?
XRB
WHY INDEED?
XRB
THIS IS GG MCDUFF SAYING, "CONSIDER THESE THINGS, AMERICA."
YOU'RE CLEAR! GREAT SHOW MCDUFF! YOU GOT 30 BEFORE THE UPDATE.
UNLESS IT'S RAINING. YOU'LL FIND ME IN MY USUAL SPOT.
NO RAIN— IT'S A BEAUTIFUL NIGHT IN THE CITY.

FUP
WUP
FWP

HELLO, GG.
LONE JUSTICE--- WHAT KEPT YOU?
YOU EXPECTED ME?
FOR YEARS--- I KNOW HOW LONG YOU'VE WANTED TO SHUT ME UP.
NOT TRUE.
SURE--- YOU BEIN' A STAUNCH SUPPORTER OF THE PRESS AND ALL---
IF ONLY THAT WERE THE REASON I'VE COME.
HONESTLY, McDUFF, I NEVER PAID MUCH ATTENTION TO YOU AT ALL.
I FIGURED YOU FOR SOME KOOK LOOKING TO MAKE HEADLINES BY STIRRING UP TROUBLE.
YEAH?
WHAT'S CHANGED?
XRB
MAYBE I'M NOT SO SURE ANYMORE YOU'RE A KOOK

OR MAYBE YOU BEING IN THE *HOT SEAT* YOU FIGURE A LITTLE *GOOD PRESS* COULDN'T *HURT* YOU—

MAYBE *SMOOTH* THINGS OUT FOR YOU?

YOU *NEED* TO LOOK INTO THE *HOOVERVILLE*—

THE *HOBO CAMP*?

I DON'T *THINK* SO.

I'M NOT GONNA BE A PART OF THOSE PEOPLE'S *RIGHTS* BEING *TRAMPLED* ON.

THAT'S *EXACTLY* WHAT YOU'LL BE DOING IF YOU *DON'T EXPOSE* THIS.

JUST A SECOND, FELLA— ARE YOU THE *REAL* LONE JUSTICE?

LAST I CHECKED YOU WEREN'T *EXACTLY* A *CHAMPION* OF THE *DOWNTRODDEN*.

MORE LIKE *HIRED-MUSCLE* FOR THE *CHAMBER OF COMMERCE*.

I'VE BEEN *WRONG* ABOUT A LOT OF THINGS

BUT I'M *NOT WRONG* ABOUT THIS.

I THINK SCION'S BEHIND AN EFFORT TO DRIVE THE HOMELESS OUT OF TOWN.

SCION? SO FIND HIM AND POUND THE CRAP OUT OF HIM.

I THINK HE MAY BE WORKING FOR THE CITY.

INTERESTING THEORY. NOT SURE I BUY IT.

CITY HALL'S APATHETIC ABOUT THOSE POOR PEOPLE, SURE— BUT A REAL EFFORT TO RUN THEM OUT?

THAT'S A STRETCH—

THESE GUYS CAN'T GET THE GARBAGE PICKED UP CONSISTENTLY.

STILL, AN AWFUL CONVENIENT WAY FOR YOU TO SHINE A LIGHT ON THE ONES WHO ARE AFTER YOU.

JUST LOOK INTO IT, MCDUFF.

WHY ME? WHY COME TO ME?

BECAUSE I FIGURED OUT YOU'RE PROBABLY THE ONLY PERSON WHO EVER TOLD THE TRUTH ABOUT ME—

The following dawn, eyes are ready to be opened—

GOOD MORNING, LADIES—
I'M HERE TO LEARN—
ABOUT THE MAN WHO CALLS HIMSELF LONE JUSTICE—
I'VE BEEN CALLED MANY THINGS IN MY TIME AS A REPORTER— NONE LEAST THAN CYNICAL—

TELL ME..

..DID THE TRAIN *ENTER* THE STATION THIS TIME?

OH C'MON--

I COULD HEAR YOU *SCREAMING* FROM *HALFWAY* DOWN THE *CORRIDOR!*

F**K YOU!

LISTEN--

--EVEN THOUGH I DO APPRECIATE THE *HEART-FELT* SYMPATHY--

—I'M FINE!

PAIR A' MOPEY C**TS!

I HAD A PRETTY *VIVID DREAM* M'SELF LAST NIGHT--

YOUS TWO, WERE DRESSED UP IN *PINK BUNNY COSTUMES.* YOU HAD BIG FLOPPY EARS AND *EVERYTHING!*

NEXT THING I KNOW-- I'M *HACKING* YOU BOTH TO DEATH WITH AN *AXE...!*

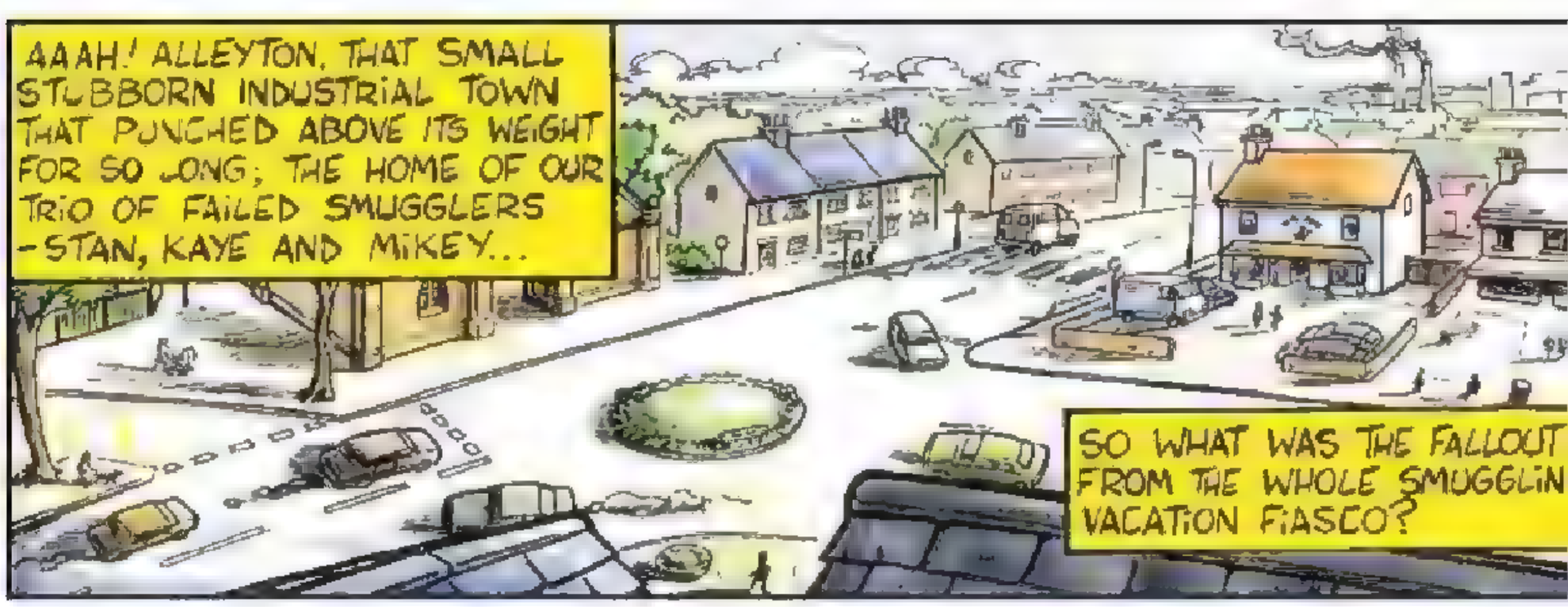
IT JUST SEEMED LIKE THE *RIGHT THING* TO DO!

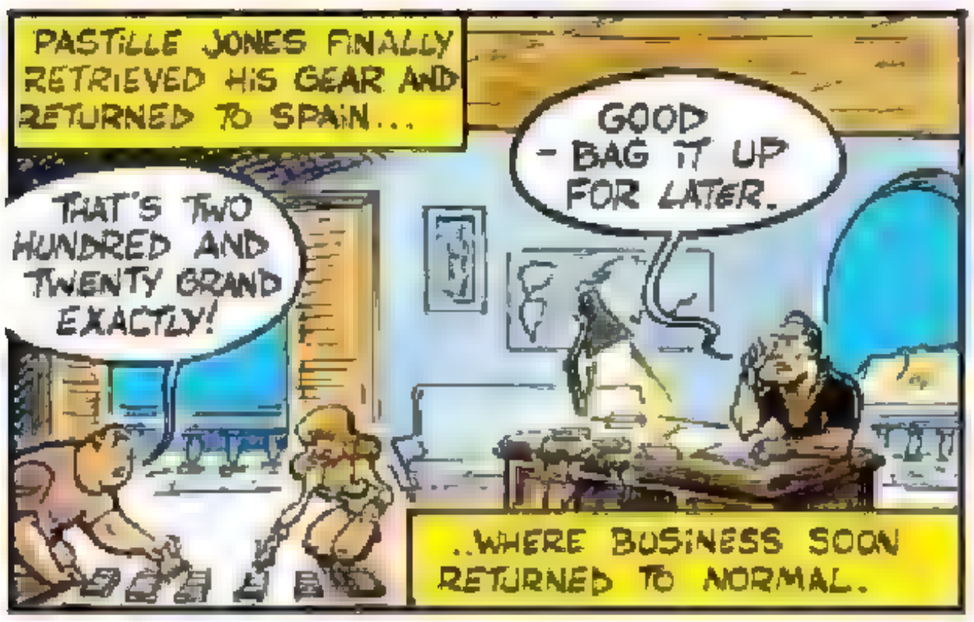
SO... WHAT'S ON THE AGENDA TODAY THEN BOYS?
..WE COULD DO A BIT A' SPRING CLEANIN' AN' BURN THIS S**T-HOLE DOWN FOR STARTERS!
OH F**K THAT! ARE YOU FORGETTIN'?
WE LIVE HERE RIFTER!
-- OR HAS THIS ROYAL PLAYACTIN' FINALLY GONE TO YOUR HEAD!

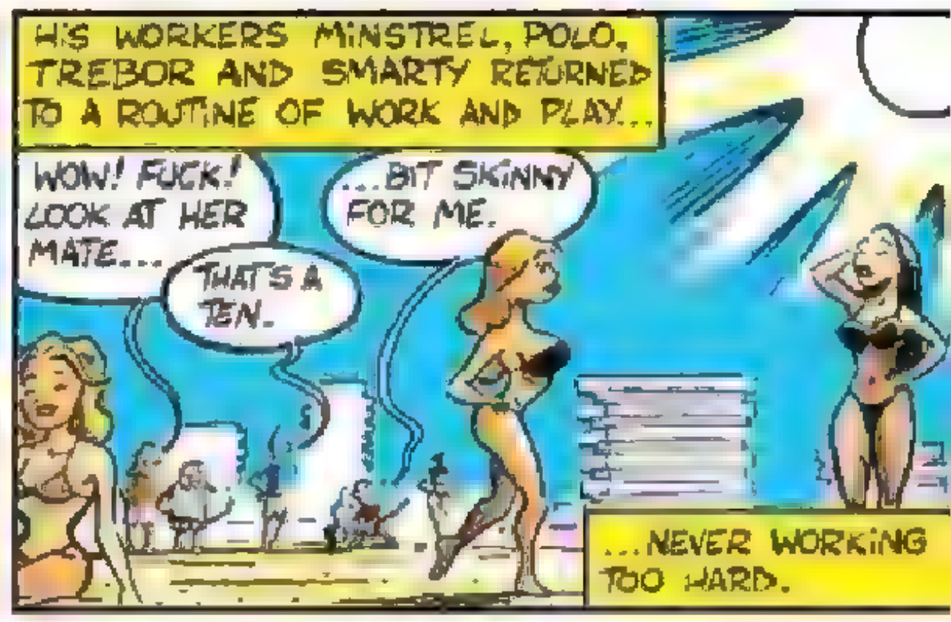
...BUT, WE CAN LIVE *ANYWHERE* THE F**K WE WANT!

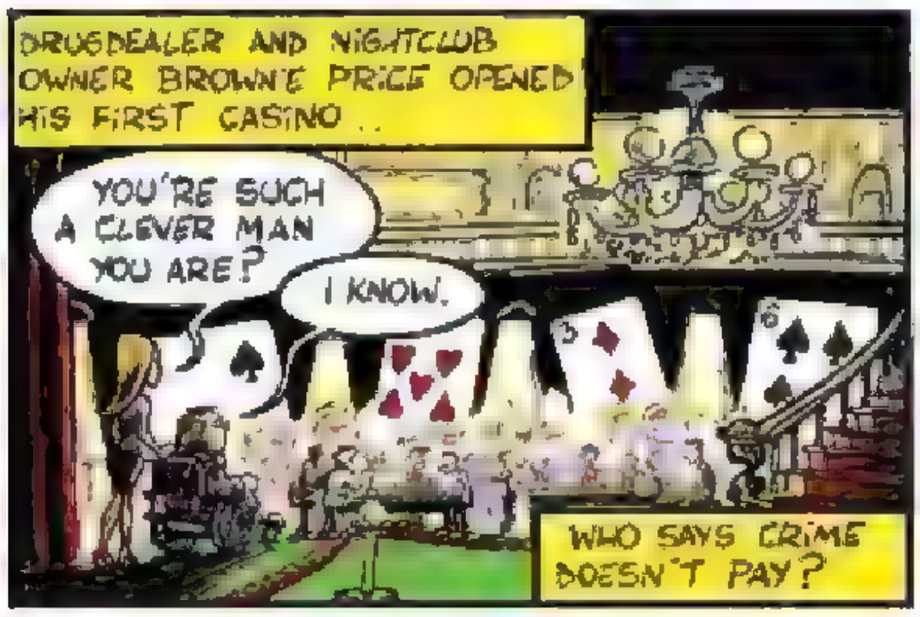
—I ALWAYS *FANCIED NUMBER TEN* M'SELF!

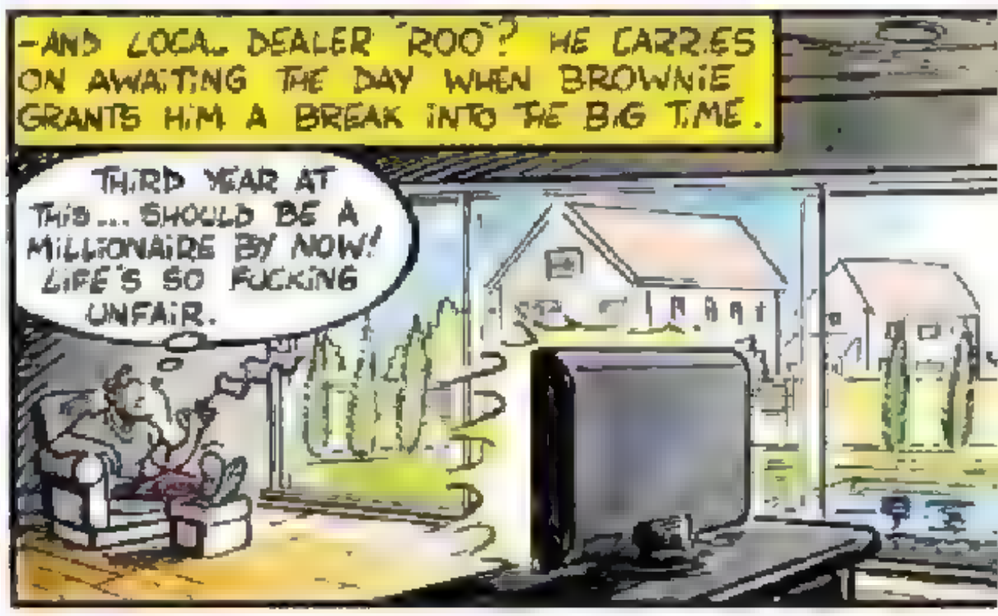
1: MEN OF GOOD FORTUNE


AAAH! ALLEYTON, THAT SMALL STUBBORN INDUSTRIAL TOWN THAT PUNCHED ABOVE ITS WEIGHT FOR SO LONG; THE HOME OF OUR TRIO OF FAILED SMUGGLERS -STAN, KAYE AND MIKEY...
SO WHAT WAS THE FALLOUT FROM THE WHOLE SMUGGLIN VACATION FIASCO?


PASTILLE JONES FINALLY RETRIEVED HIS GEAR AND RETURNED TO SPAIN...
GOOD - BAG IT UP FOR LATER.
THAT'S TWO HUNDRED AND TWENTY GRAND EXACTLY!
..WHERE BUSINESS SOON RETURNED TO NORMAL.


HIS WORKERS MINSTREL, POLO, TREBOR AND SMARTY RETURNED TO A ROUTINE OF WORK AND PLAY...
WOW! FUCK! LOOK AT HER MATE...
...BIT SKINNY FOR ME.
THAT'S A TEN.
...NEVER WORKING TOO HARD.


DRUGDEALER AND NIGHTCLUB OWNER BROWNIE PRICE OPENED HIS FIRST CASINO..
YOU'RE SUCH A CLEVER MAN YOU ARE?
I KNOW.
WHO SAYS CRIME DOESN'T PAY?


-AND LOCAL DEALER 'ROO'? HE CARRIES ON AWAITING THE DAY WHEN BROWNIE GRANTS HIM A BREAK INTO THE BIG TIME.
THIRD YEAR AT THIS... SHOULD BE A MILLIONAIRE BY NOW! LIFE'S SO FUCKING UNFAIR.

AS FOR OUR FAILED TRIO OF SMUGGLERS... MIKEY RETURNED TO HIS LIFE OF HARD WORK...

...ANOTHER PINT PLEASE LOVE.

KAYE RETURNS TO HER JOB AT MARKS AND SPENCERS WHERE HER PATIENCE IS A VIRTUE...

COULD YOU JUST MAKE UP YOUR MIND!! I DO HAVE THINGS TO DO YOU KNOW!

CHANGING ROOMS

AND STAN? STAN RETURNS TO THE I.T JOB HE ADORES SO MUCH...

...YOU'VE GOT TWO MINUTES! THEN I'M GONNA SMASH YOUR FUCKING.. BLOODY...STUPID.. GNNRR!!

ALL SEEMS TO HAVE RETURNED TO NORMAL...OR HAS IT?

EARLY ONE MORNING OUTSIDE THEIR FLAT ABOVE THE HAIRDRESSERS...

FOR CRYING OUT LOUD!! WHAT TOOK YOU SO LONG?

JUST CHANGING MY SHOES...

SAMSON

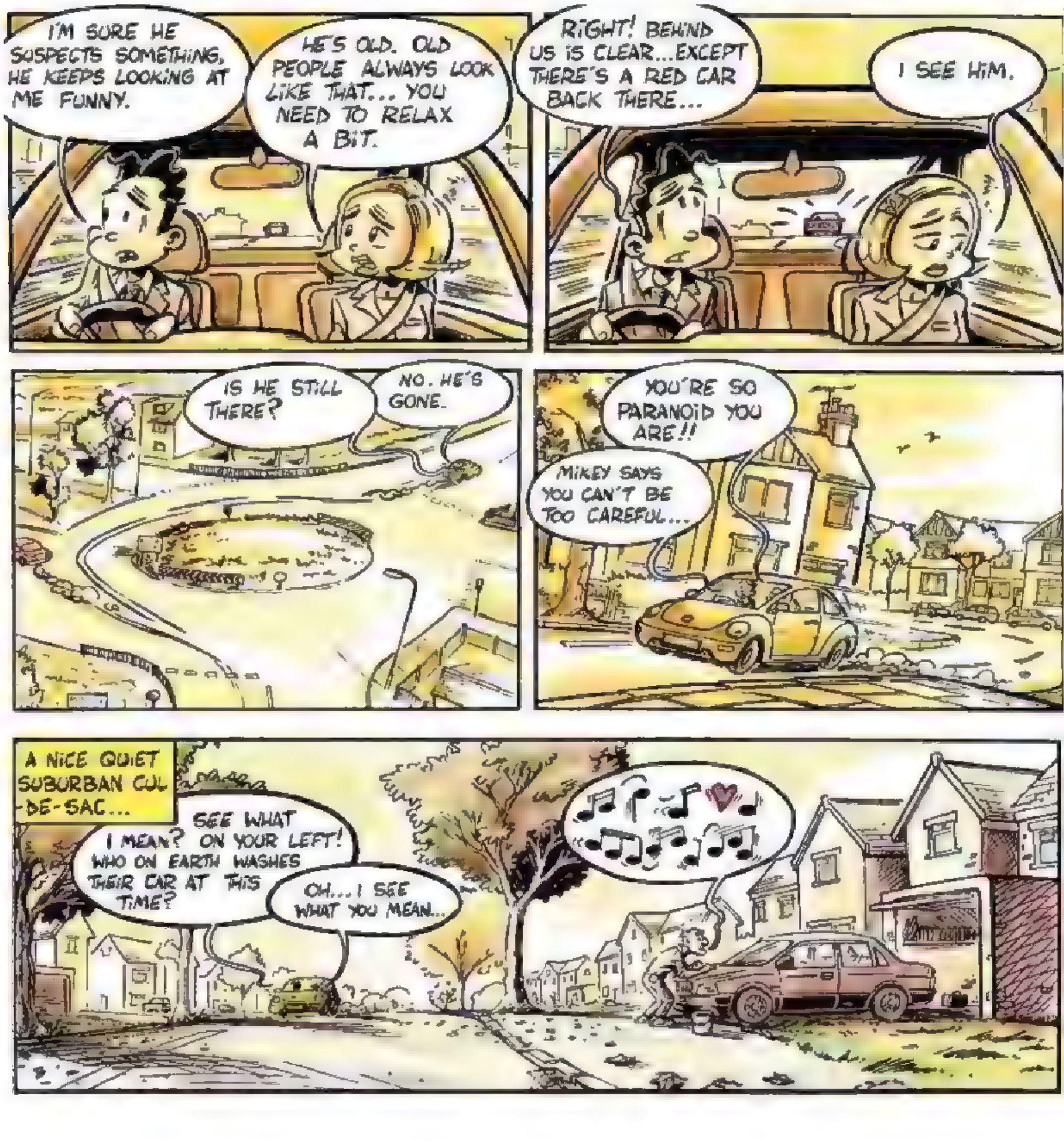
WELL JUST HURRY UP! I WANTED TO GET THERE AS EARLY AS WE CAN.

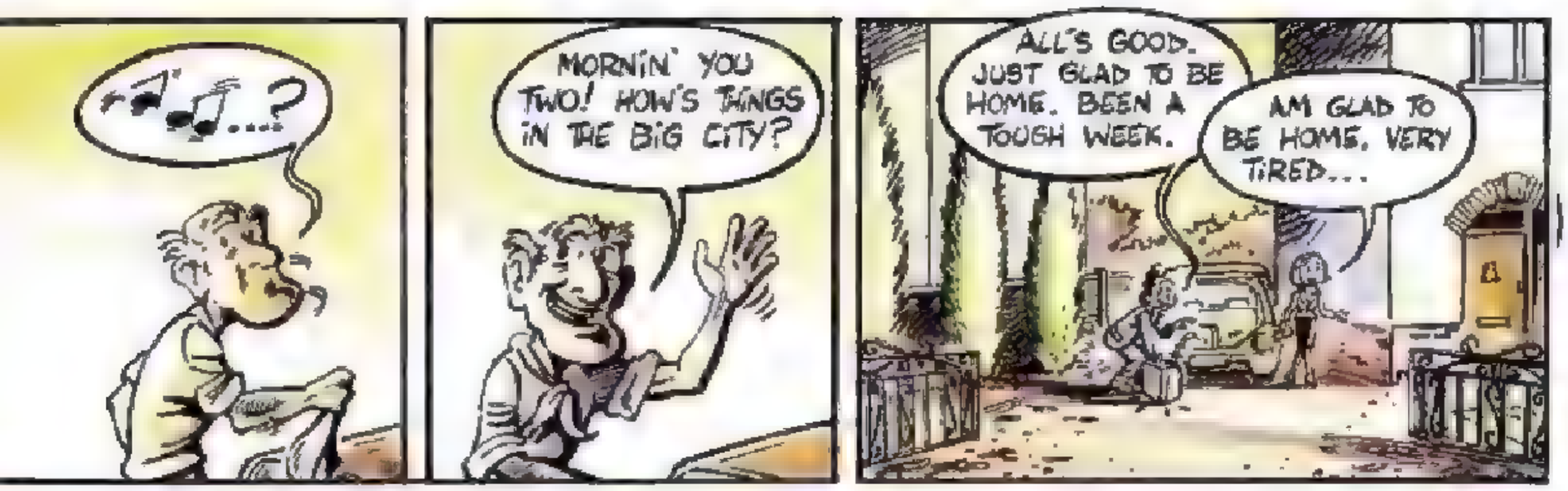
TEN MINUTES WON'T DO ANY HARM...

S 14 VAE

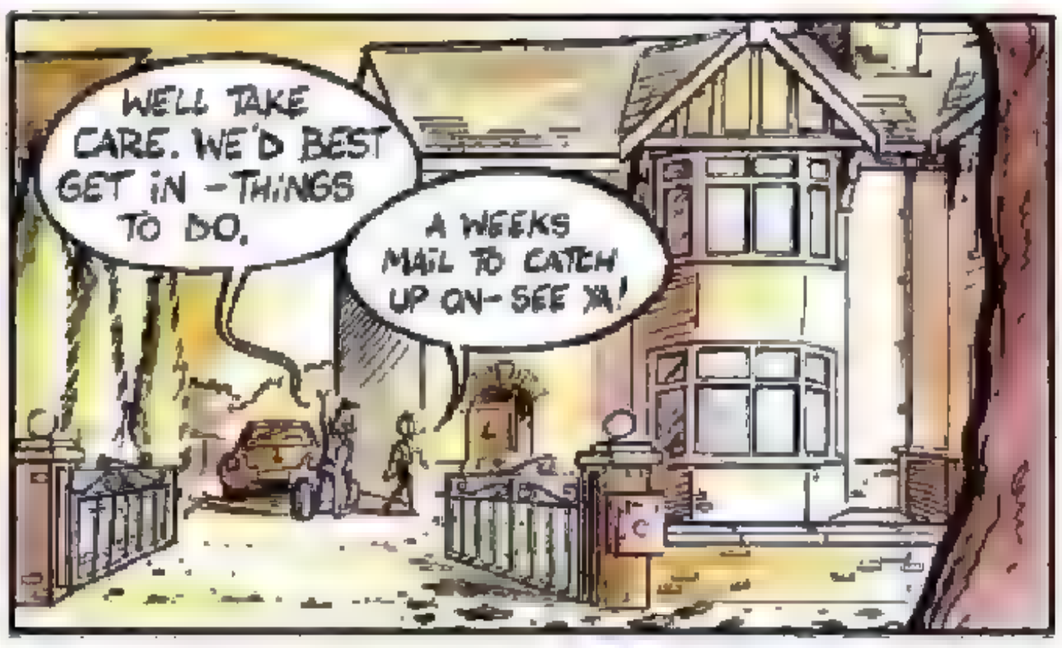
BESIDES, WE'RE SELF EMPLOYED NOW - WE CAN BE AS LATE AS WE WANT.

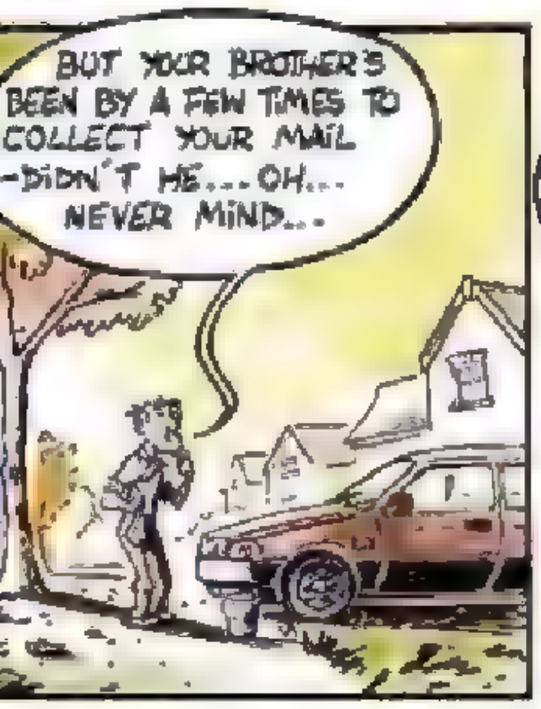
I KNOW. BUT I WANTED TO AVOID THE NEIGHBOUR. HE'S GETTING A BIT TOO FRIENDLY FOR MY LIKING.


I'M SURE HE SUSPECTS SOMETHING, HE KEEPS LOOKING AT ME FUNNY.
HE'S OLD. OLD PEOPLE ALWAYS LOOK LIKE THAT... YOU NEED TO RELAX A BIT.
RIGHT! BEHIND US IS CLEAR...EXCEPT THERE'S A RED CAR BACK THERE...
I SEE HIM.
IS HE STILL THERE?
NO. HE'S GONE.
YOU'RE SO PARANOID YOU ARE!!
MIKEY SAYS YOU CAN'T BE TOO CAREFUL...
A NICE QUIET SUBURBAN CUL-DE-SAC...
SEE WHAT I MEAN? ON YOUR LEFT! WHO ON EARTH WASHES THEIR CAR AT THIS TIME?
OH... I SEE WHAT YOU MEAN...

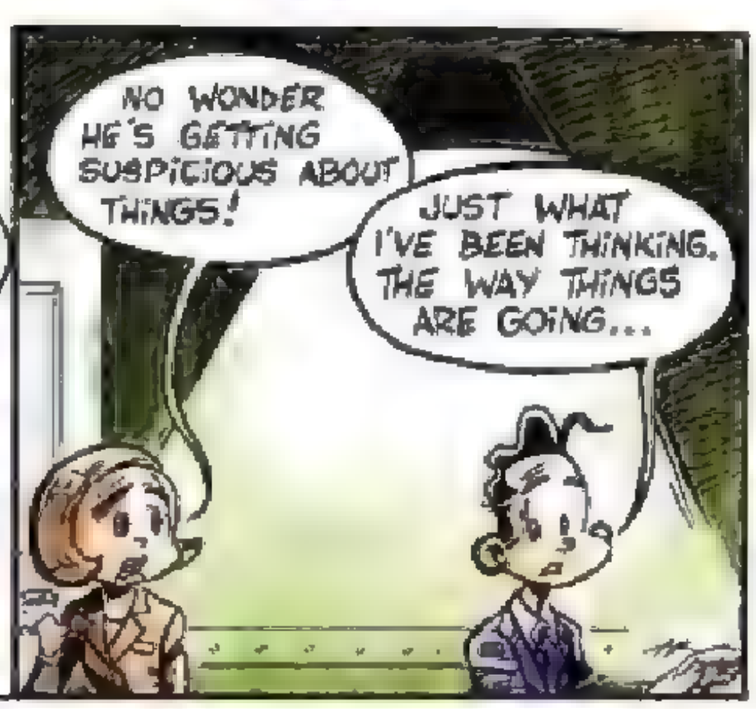

...?
MORNIN' YOU TWO! HOW'S THINGS IN THE BIG CITY?
ALL'S GOOD. JUST GLAD TO BE HOME. BEEN A TOUGH WEEK.
AM GLAD TO BE HOME. VERY TIRED...

HOW'S THINGS WITH YOU? ARTHRITIS ANY BETTER?
YOU SHOULD TAKE IT EASY. BEING UP AT THIS TIME -YOU DO TOO MUCH YOU DO...


WE'LL TAKE CARE. WE'D BEST GET IN -THINGS TO DO.
A WEEKS MAIL TO CATCH UP ON- SEE YA!


BUT YOUR BROTHER'S BEEN BY A FEW TIMES TO COLLECT YOUR MAIL -DIDN'T HE... OH... NEVER MIND...

INSIDE...
DON'T YOU THINK YOU'RE DOING THE BEST NEIGHBOUR PART A BIT MUCH?
WHAT ELSE CAN I DO?


NO WONDER HE'S GETTING SUSPICIOUS ABOUT THINGS!
JUST WHAT I'VE BEEN THINKING. THE WAY THINGS ARE GOING...

...I DON'T FEEL LIKE THERE'S ANYTHING WRONG WITH *ME*. I'M *FINE*. BUT BEING HOME NOW... IT'S LIKE A *BATTLEFIELD*.

JAMES. AND THE SHAPE OF THE PAVEMENT. AND BUSES NOT STOPPING FOR YOU. AND EVERYONE NOTICING YOU. EVERY TIME.

IT'S NOT ME THAT'S BROKEN. IT'S... ALL THIS!

AND I TRY AND BE THIS COOL GUY ABOUT IT. SMILEY SMILEY. BUT...

OH, HEY--

--THAT IS, I THINK, THE LONGEST I'VE EVER TALKED ABOUT IT. SERIOUSLY.

IT'S OKAY--

--AWKWARDNESS BANISHED.

BUT I HAVE ONE MORE AWKWARD QUESTION. IT'S NOT THE SORT OF THING A GIRL NORMALLY HAS TO, ERM, ASK AT THIS POINT...

THE ANSWER TO THAT IS: PARALYZED FROM THE WAIST DOWN. BUT...TO MAKE THIS CLEAR...

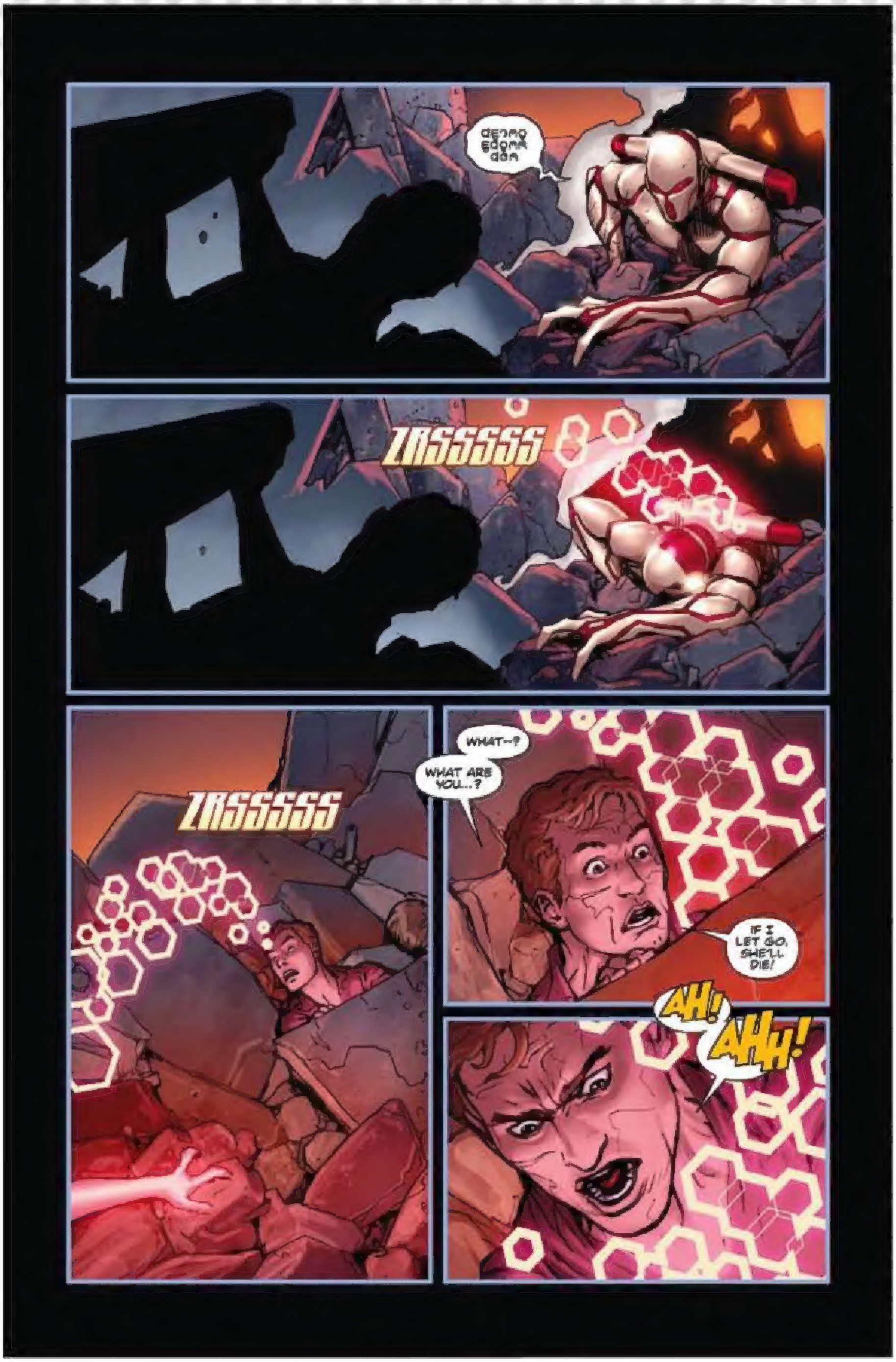
...MY QUESTION IS--

--WHAT ARE YOU DOING ON TUESDAY NI--?

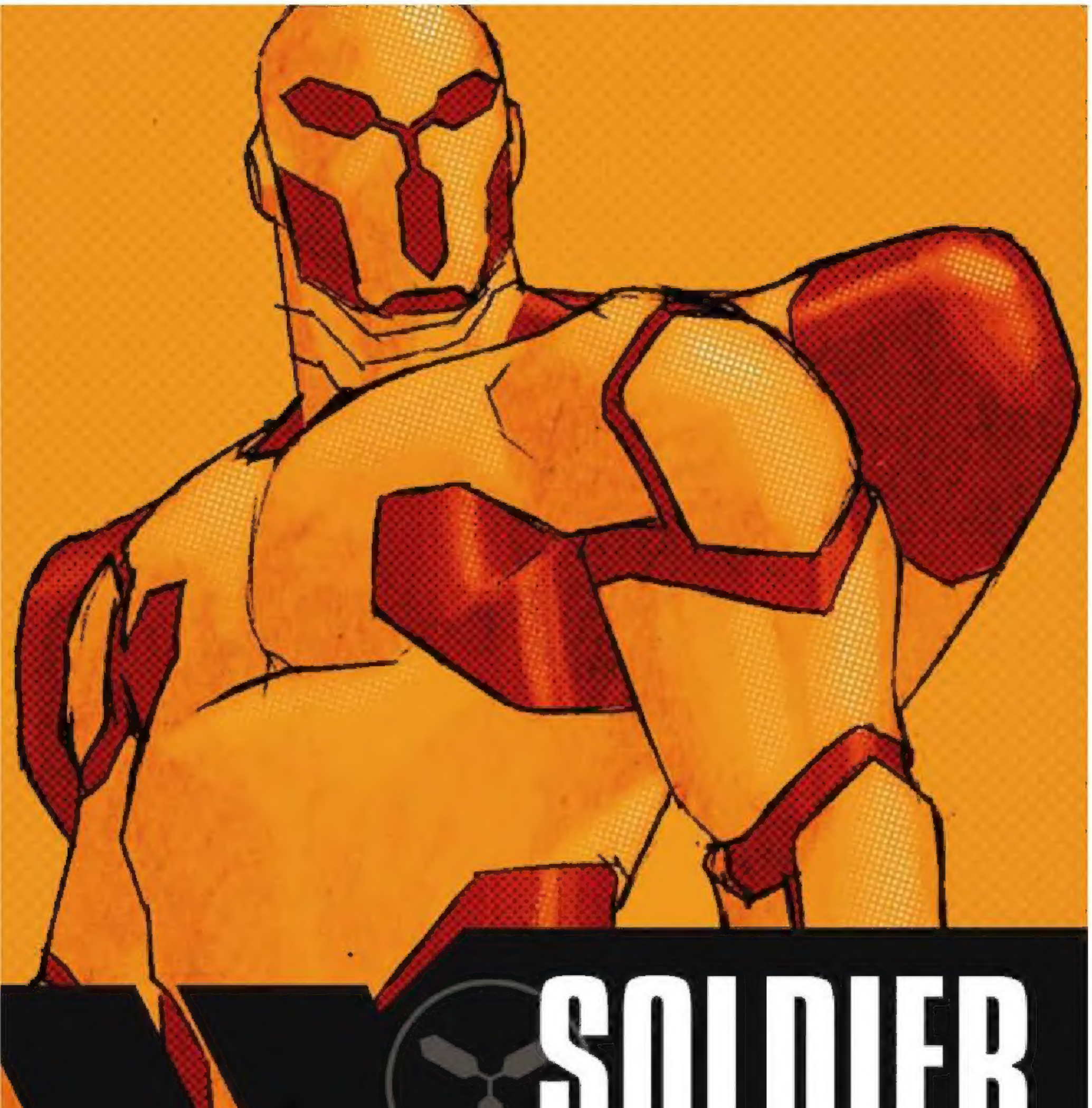
WHAT IS--?!

PHA-BIM!

AHH!
AH! AH! I CAN'T HOLD IT!
HELP!
CAN ANYONE HEAR ME—?!
IS...IS THAT...?


DEMO EDOMA DOM
IRSSSSS
IRSSSSS
WHAT--?
WHAT ARE YOU...?
IF I LET GO, SHE'LL DIE!
AH!
AHH!

AHHHHHH!
RARRGGGHHH!
WHAT...?
WHAT IS THIS?!


Stan Lee
SOLDIER
ZERO
STAN LEE
PAUL CORNELL
BOOM!
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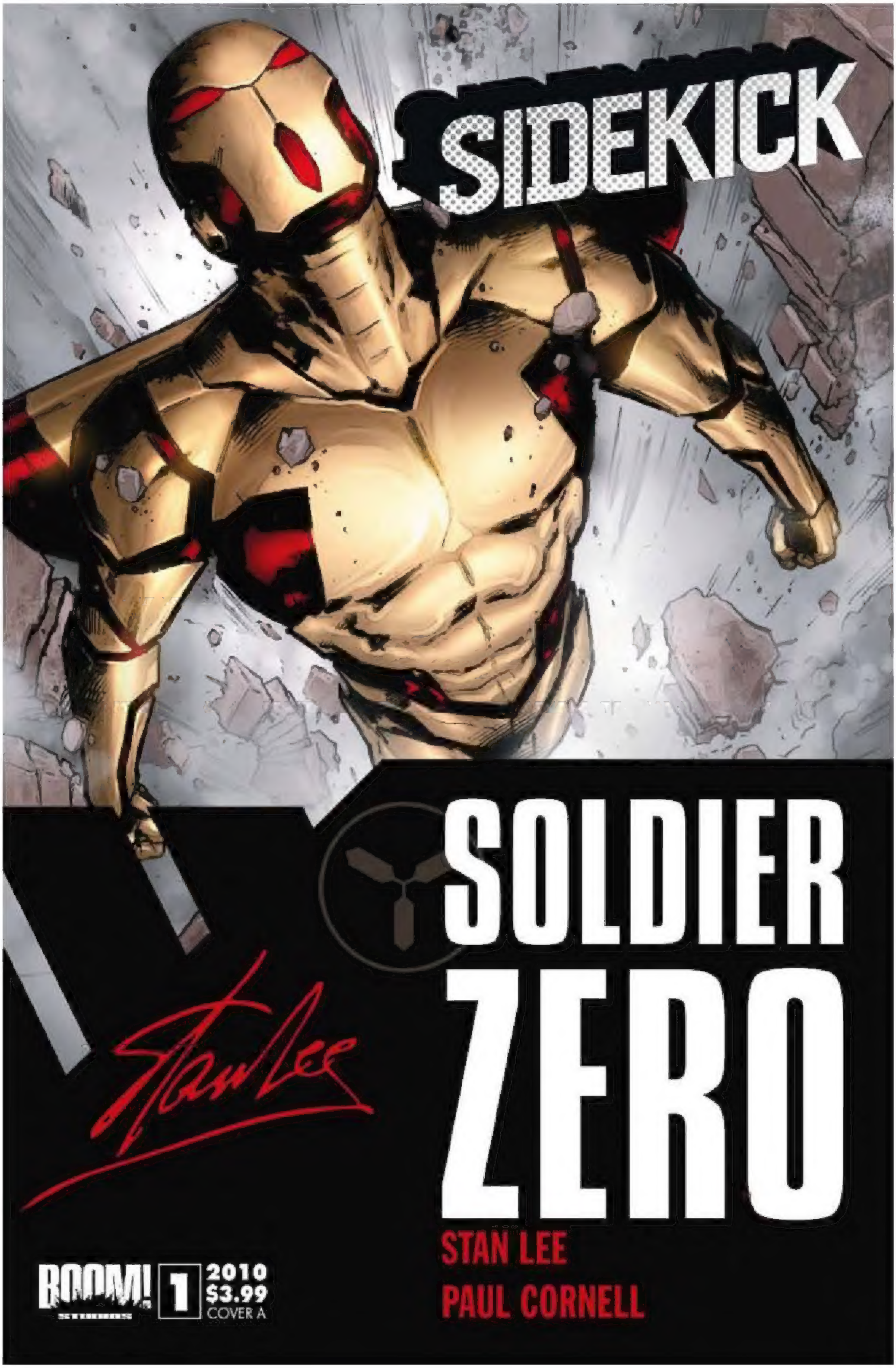
SIDEKICK
SOLDIER
ZERO
Stan Lee
STAN LEE
PAUL CORNELL
BOOM!
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